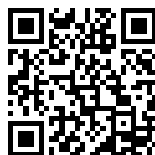

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In Our Tongues

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IN OUR TONGUES

IN OUR TONGUES

SOME THOUGHTS FOR READERS
OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

BY
at
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||
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**TO
MY MOTHER**

PREFACE

IN offering this book for the consideration of readers of the English Bible, it may be well that I should state briefly its *raison d'être*. Having been engaged in the teaching of Hebrew during the last twenty years, I have naturally been led to attempt to formulate the chief differences between Hebrew and English thought as reflected in the idioms of the two languages. In doing so, I have been greatly impressed by the fact that many passages of the English Bible, which present no difficulties to one acquainted with the peculiarities of Hebrew, are serious stumbling-blocks to the faith of many, who understand the words in their ordinary English sense. I have, therefore, endeavoured to point out to my pupils, as occasion arose, the essential characteristics of Hebrew idiom, illustrating

my remarks from the New as well as from the Old Testament. I have almost invariably found that such explanations have been eagerly listened to, and that they have supplied a need which is apparently widely felt. Accordingly, when the Grantham Clerical Society did me the honour of inviting me to address them at one of their meetings this summer, I determined to collect my scattered notes on this subject into a paper with the title, 'Some Hebrew Idioms in the Old and New Testaments.' The kind reception given to this paper on its first reading emboldens me to offer it now to a wider circle, in the hope that it may do a little to clear away some of those difficulties which have arisen through a misconception of what the Prophets and Apostles intended. It accordingly stands first in the book in the form in which it was originally written, except for some slight modifications and additions. The rest of the book consists of sermons, preached for the most part in Ely Cathedral, in which I have attempted to set forth to some extent what I believe to be the great principles of our Saviour's teaching, principles which are, perhaps, in danger of being over-

looked through misunderstanding of what I may call the idiom of Christ. I am convinced that if it be once admitted that our Lord thought and spoke after the manner of the prophets, many sayings in the Gospels, which have been regarded as later unauthentic additions to the original record of His words, will be found to be perfectly appropriate in His mouth. I venture to think that, notwithstanding all the learning that has been brought to bear on the New Testament, the true meaning of many a passage is often overlooked, simply because men of Western thought and classical education are out of sympathy with the Hebrew mind. While I fully recognize the necessity of the criticism of the New Testament as of the Old, I would plead, if not for a more careful, at any rate for a more sympathetic study of each portion of it. It will, I believe, be found that much which, when understood literally, seems irreconcilable with the principles of Christ is capable of an interpretation in perfect harmony with them. While we must make due allowance for the misunderstanding of the words of our Lord by His disciples, we need not

suppose that the disciples themselves or the generation of Christians that succeeded them were seriously mistaken as to the words which He had used. Whether our Lord's language be derived from the Old Testament Scriptures, in which His mind was steeped, or from the popular religious imagery of his time, it is but reasonable to suppose, since His whole conception of religion was different from that of His disciples, that the sense which He intended His words to bear would be more spiritual, more poetical, indeed, than it seemed to be in the prosaic ears of His disciples. In other words, we must interpret our Lord's teaching according to the highest flights of prophecy rather than according to the lowest level of legal literalism or apocalyptic materialism. It may be that we who adopt so scornful an attitude towards scribes and Pharisees are nevertheless prone to interpret the words of their great Opponent according to their methods, not only materializing what was meant to be spiritual, but also finding contradictions where none exist. If—with all reverence be it said—we can but look at the things connected with our religion, the

Scriptures and the Ordinances of devotion, through the eyes of Jesus of Nazareth, we shall have more patience and more faith to await the solution of those problems which are yet unsolved ; we shall know that the Gospel has not lost its value, and that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

One other word of explanation is necessary. The sermons contained in this book were composed at irregular intervals, and with no idea of their being ultimately published, and in consequence they occasionally cover the same ground. It seems better, however, to incur the charge of repetition than to run any risk of being misunderstood, and I have, therefore, decided to print the sermons essentially the same as they were delivered.

ROBERT H. KENNETT.

THE COLLEGE, ELY,
August 21, 1907.

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IN OUR TONGUES
SOME THOUGHTS FOR READERS OF THE
ENGLISH BIBLE

IN OUR TONGUES

I

SOME HEBREW IDIOMS IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

‘And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence.’—ACTS xxii. 2.

THE present generation has witnessed an activity and an interest in Bible study which has probably never been equalled at any period of the Church’s history. A cursory glance at a few publishers’ catalogues is sufficient to show that, notwithstanding all the apparent apathy and irreligion of the present day, a very large, and probably an increasing, number of men and women have an intense zeal for God. But a zeal for God, unless it be according to knowledge, may have unlooked-for and dangerous results. Those who start their

study of the Scriptures with wrong canons of interpretation may do a harm to the Church's faith which cannot easily be undone.

It is nowadays generally admitted that, if we are to get at all a clear conception of a man's life and personality, we must know something more about him than what can be learnt from a mere record of his words and doings. A modern biographer considers it not irrelevant not merely to describe the environment of the subject of his biography, but also to give an account of his ancestry. Indeed, without helps of this kind it is almost impossible to form a just estimate of a man's character.

St. Paul, in his enumeration of the blessings of his own people, states as their crowning blessing that 'of them as concerning the flesh Christ came'; and it would therefore seem natural as an introduction to the study of Christ's words and work to devote some study to the history and the Scriptures of the Israel to which according to the flesh He belonged. Unfortunately, however, this necessary introduction is too often almost wholly neglected, and that by men of sound scholarship and

religious instincts. It is a common thing for men to pass straight from the study of the classics to that of the New Testament with the most meagre knowledge of the older Scriptures. And not only are they ignorant of the Old Testament, but they have imbibed a contempt for everything that is not Greek, and most of all for what is Jewish. We smile to-day when we read a criticism of a Gothic cathedral by an eighteenth-century architect. We realize how absolutely incapable he was, with the canons of taste in which he had been trained, of appreciating the glories of our medieval churches. But, alas! it is not generally perceived that it is equally impossible for a mind trained wholly in Greek, or, at any rate, in Western, methods to appreciate the teaching of our Lord and of the New Testament, although between Hebrew thought—in which I include the New Testament—and Western thought there is at least as much difference as between a Gothic cathedral and a Greek temple.

There are many results of the common lack of appreciation of this difference, but it will be sufficient for me on the present occasion to mention one only, since it is the one which is

most frequently found among educated men. There is an increasing tendency to *apologize* for Christ, and to represent Him as having been seriously misunderstood by the Apostles whom He had chosen. St. Paul's gospel is in some quarters represented as different from, and, in some degree, antagonistic to, the Gospel of Christ, and as the inevitable result the worth of the New Testament as a record of the teaching of Christ is seriously impaired. Men are apt to substitute what they think Christ ought to have taught for what, as a matter of fact, He did teach.

But we can only arrive at the actual teaching of our Lord and of the New Testament writers by a careful study of the thought, as represented in the language, of the nation to which they belonged. The process of translation as applied to the Bible has been far too mechanical to make any version an altogether trustworthy guide to the interpretation of Scripture. Translation from one language into another, especially from an ancient into a modern or from a primitive into a highly developed one, is beset by this danger, that what is indefinite in the original becomes more

sharply defined and limited in meaning in the version. Thus, to give one illustration, the Hebrew word '*āwôn* may sometimes mean *iniquity*, which is the rendering generally adopted for it in our English versions. But the ideas connected with '*āwôn* are far wider than the idea suggested by the word *iniquity*, and the use of this English rendering is therefore in many places positively misleading. Frequently, indeed, a literal translation conveys an altogether wrong impression, and the sense of the original can only be adequately expressed by a paraphrase.

Here, however, it may be well to meet an objection which will perhaps be brought against the representation of the New Testament as a product of Hebrew thought. It may be urged that, however difficult it may be to arrive at the true sense of the Old Testament without a knowledge of Hebrew, the New Testament, having been written in a Western language, can more easily be understood by men of Western thought.

But the New Testament is Greek only in the sense that the actual words of which it is composed are Greek words. If we seek for

illustrations of the *ideas* which the writers strove to express by those words, we must go, not to Greek sources, but to Hebrew—to the Old Testament Scriptures and to early Jewish writings. It is only the external form of the New Testament which has anything Western about it; to adapt the words of Isaac, the hands are the hands of a Greek, but the voice is the voice of Israel. A very large number of the difficulties which beset modern English readers of the Bible are difficulties of their own making, due to the fact that they have put upon the words a sense which they never bore in the minds of the original writers.

It is unnecessary to say that the only way to obtain a clear conception of Hebrew thought is by studying the Hebrew language. But though the number of Hebrew students would undoubtedly be far greater than it is if the importance of the study were generally recognized, yet at best only a very small percentage of Christians would be able to devote themselves to such a study. The utmost that can be done for the majority is to give them principles of interpretation which may enable them to correct the wrong impressions so fre-

quently produced by the words of the English Bible taken in their *prima facie* meaning.

At the outset of his study of the Bible the English student is placed at a serious disadvantage, since he is, as a rule, ignorant of the extraordinarily metaphorical character of the Hebrew language. True, all language is in some degree metaphorical. As Carlyle says: 'Examine Language; what, if you except some few primitive elements (of natural sound), what is it all but Metaphors, recognized as such or no longer recognized. . . . An unmetaphorical style you shall in vain seek for; is not your very *Attention* a *Stretching-to*?'* But whereas in common Western speech metaphors are for the most part not recognized as such, inasmuch as they have crystallized into abstracts, in Hebrew this process of crystallization has only just begun, and the same root is used to express both abstract and concrete ideas. Thus, to give an illustration, the root *KBD* means simply *to be heavy*; but partly perhaps from the habitual weighing of gold and silver in the market at a time when there was no coinage, partly from the fact that

* 'Sartor Resartus,' book i., chap. xi.

all property in early times was 'portable property,' the root was used to denote that which was *valuable* or *abundant*; thus the word *kābōd* (derived from the same root) expresses first *wealth*, *abundance*, and then the external *pomp* and *magnificence* associated with it, being finally used to denote *honour* and *glory*. Only, at the same time that this root *KBD* was being used to express abstract ideas, it was also used to express ideas essentially concrete; so that there was little danger of the metaphorical nature of its use as an abstract being forgotten. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that a Hebrew seldom opened his mouth without making use of a metaphor; and since under such circumstances it was impossible to continue one metaphor consistently, he simply threw consistency to the winds. If I may myself be allowed a metaphor, a Hebrew sucked out the juice of each metaphor as he used it, and threw away the skin at once. Thus, to give an illustration, the prophet Isaiah (xxviii. 18) says to the 'scornful men' of Jerusalem, 'When the overflowing scourge shall pass by, then shall ye be trodden down by it.' Here we have three irrecon-

cilable metaphors blended together in one short sentence—viz., a flood, a whip, and a trampling host, and the English reader has his breath fairly taken away by the audacity of the combination. But this sentence, which to unsympathetic English ears recalls the smell of the rat which brooded on the horizon and was to be nipped in the bud, is in the Hebrew perfectly natural, and would be quite wrongly described as a bull. For if we take the meaning of each metaphor as we come to it, rejecting its outer form, or, in other words, if we translate the Hebrew according to the *ideas* which the prophet intended to express rather than according to the actual *words*, we obtain a statement with which the most prosaic of readers could find no fault. For the metaphor of a *flood* suggested by the word ‘overflowing’ merely expresses the far-reaching, penetrating character of the coming catastrophe; the metaphor of a *whip* or *scourge* is so commonly used in our own language to express a dire calamity that with us it has almost ceased to be a metaphor; and, lastly, the figure of the trampling host merely denotes the irresistible nature of the punishment to be

inflicted; so that those who prefer prose to poetry would be justified in translating Isaiah's words somewhat as follows: 'When the far-reaching calamity comes, you will be powerless to escape from it.'

But it is not only in short sentences such as the one which I have quoted that a Hebrew can blend his metaphors; even in the case of extended metaphors, or, as we should rather call them, allegories, he cares little for verbal consistency. Thus in the last two verses of the Book of Isaiah we have a picture of Jerusalem at the termination of the great struggle between Jehovah and the kingdoms of the world, which is so prominent an idea in the latest prophecy. Here the universal acceptance of the teaching which goes forth from Sion is expressed by the picture of the weekly and monthly assembling of all flesh to worship at Jerusalem. 'It shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord.'

It is hardly necessary to point out that the prophet did not mean his words to be understood *au pied de la lettre*. It was at least as

obvious to him as it is to us that Jews from the extreme north of Galilee, who were at least four days' journey from Jerusalem, could not come thither to worship every Sabbath. It is true that the prophet does not actually mention Jerusalem in this verse, but the context and parallel passages show clearly that the scene of this allegorical description is laid at Jerusalem, which, indeed, according to Old Testament ideas, was the only place where it was possible to 'worship before' Jehovah.

But the prophet wished to comfort his people with the thought that the victory of Jehovah to which he looked forward would be permanent, and he has accordingly represented the worshippers as gazing week by week on the *evidences* of the utter defeat of the ungodly: 'And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.' Here the carcasses—oh that the Christian Church had remembered that it is *carcasses*, *dead* bodies, that are here described!—are represented as

cast into some place outside that in which the godly have worshipped, probably the valley of Hinnom, which could be seen from the Temple hill. Into this place the prophet imagines the bodies of all those who have died in battle against Jehovah to have been brought. There they lie, a putrefying mass on which the worms are feeding, and, since they are too numerous for burial, great fires are lighted in order to consume them. Now, it is obvious that the two statements, 'their worm shall not die,' and 'their fire shall not be quenched,' are irreconcilable both with one another and with the rest of the allegory. For the worms of those bodies which were placed in the fire would speedily die, and in any case the worms could only live so long as the bodies on which they fed were not utterly consumed, while the fires would remain unquenched only so long as there remained bodies to be destroyed. The essential meaning of the statements is that there can be no recrudescence of hostility to Jehovah; those who lie in the valley of Hinnom can never again arise and stand up upon their feet an exceeding great army. A somewhat similar statement is found in Deut.

xi. 4, where it is said, 'The Lord hath destroyed them [the Egyptians] unto this day.'

It is evident, as I have said, that a people accustomed to so free a use of metaphor would care little for consistency even in more extended metaphors or allegories. Absolute consistency, indeed, is not to be looked for in any allegory, but a Hebrew teacher certainly allowed himself greater licence in this respect than would a modern. Thus, for example, in the allegory of Dan. iv. we have a description of the cutting down of a tree at the height of its luxuriant growth; but because the author is really thinking, not of the tree itself, but of what it typifies, he adds (ver. 16), 'let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him,' introducing a thought which is quite at variance with the figure of a tree.

As a rule, the Hebrew cared only for the thought which he was presenting by means of his allegory, and was utterly indifferent as to the external form of the latter. If the thought was clear, the figure in which it was clothed might be impossible in fact, or to

modern notions simply ridiculous. This was due not to any lack of a sense of humour among the Hebrews, for a sense of humour was at least as strongly developed among them as among ourselves, but simply to the fact that the Hebrew knew that his readers would interpret each stage of the allegory as it proceeded, and would combine into a whole, not the external details, but the truths presented by means of them. A good illustration of this fundamental difference between the Hebrew and the Western mind is presented by the Book of Jonah, the most Christian in its teaching of all the books of the Old Testament. No modern allegory writer would ever dream of letting his hero be swallowed by a fish and live for three days and three nights in the fish's belly undigested and unharmed ; but the Hebrew author of Jonah, since he had in mind, not the actual man Jonah and a real fish, but the people of Israel, typified by Jonah, and the kingdoms of the world, typified by the fish or sea monster, could venture on a story which the ignorant and unsympathetic modern reader classes with Jack the Giant-killer.

In the same book is found also another

characteristic of Hebrew authors—viz., the utilization of existing stories. The fish which swallowed Jonah is merely an adaptation of the old myth of *Tiāmat*, to which we find a number of references in both Testaments.

But the Book of Jonah is not the only allegory in the Bible of which the external form is impossible. The same may be said of some of our Lord's parables. The king who made a marriage feast for his son (St. Matt. xxii.) is described as behaving in a way which recalls the kings in the 'Arabian Nights' rather than any real person. But though as a mere story the parable is impossible, no one could miss the spiritual truth which it teaches. My object in calling attention to its literal impossibility is merely to protest against the common practice of applying the details of our Lord's parables generally to a use for which they were never intended.

It is not surprising, having regard to the characteristics which I have described, that a Hebrew should habitually put spiritual edification before historical truth; the latter, indeed, possessed little or no value in his eyes

compared with the former.* He might use historical names in his allegories, and give actual dates to the incidents he described, without thereby implying the historical truth of the story he told. Let me give an illustration from the Talmud. In Pirke Aboth v. 9 we read as follows : ' Ten things were created

* It is not altogether unnecessary to emphasize this fact in connexion with the so-called historical books of the Old Testament. In the Book of Kings we find appended, almost as a refrain to the accounts of the several kings of Israel, the formula, ' Now, the rest of the acts of So-and-so, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel ? ' The reign of Omri, certainly one of the greatest kings who ever sat on the throne of Israel, is summed up in four verses ; but by means of this formula the writer refers those who might desire further information about Omri to ' the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel. ' No *historian* would have dreamt of omitting all mention of Omri's conquest of Edom, which we know from the Moabite Stone, or of his relations with Damascus, which we learn incidentally from the conversation between Ahab and Benhadad related in 1 Kings xx. 34. The natural inference is that the compiler of Kings was not attempting to write a history (in our sense of the term), but to give an account of Jehovah's dealings with Israel, deriving his material from documents which he believed to be historical.

between the suns. The mouth of the earth; and the *mouth of* the well; and the mouth of the ass; and the bow (Gen. ix. 13); and the manna; and the rod; and the shamir-worm; and the character; and the writing; and the tables. And some say, the spirits also; and the sepulchre of Moses (Deut. xxxiv. 6); and the ram of Abraham our father (Gen. xxii. 13). And some say, tongs also, made with tongs.* The things which are here enumerated as having been made 'between the suns'—*i.e.*, at the end of the sixth day of creation—are either miracles, such as the mouth of the earth which opened and swallowed up Korah, or are typical of various arts, such as the writing and the tongs, which represent generally man's work in metals and the like. The tongs are selected as a type, because the smith in making a pair of tongs needs a pair with which to hold the glowing metal, and therefore a pair of tongs may be taken as the starting-point of all work in metal. The statement that all these things were made on the last day of creation simply

* Quoted from Dr. C. Taylor's 'Sayings of the Jewish Fathers,' a book which deserves to be far more widely known and carefully studied.

means that the *potentiality* for all subsequent developments was created then. According to the view here set forth, the things which are commonly considered miracles, such as the opening of the earth to swallow up Korah, and the like, were not reversals of the law of Nature ordained at the beginning, but the law of Nature was so ordained that at the times when these things happened they were in accordance with law. We may not agree with this view, but at any rate there is nothing puerile or unworthy about it. Similarly, if the statement about the tongs be not understood *au pied de la lettre*, we shall not feel disposed to quarrel with the teaching that there was given to man at the beginning the power of advancing in arts and sciences.

The difficulty which English readers have in understanding the metaphorical or allegorical utterances of a Hebrew is greatly intensified by the fact that a Hebrew takes no pains to point out when he intends to be taken literally and when metaphorically. A Hebrew uses but few qualifying particles, and seldom modifies his absolute assertions by any saving clause. He says 'blood' when he

means 'red like blood,' 'water' when he means 'weak as water.' Thus the prophet Joel declares that the moon will be turned into blood, when he is merely describing the red colour which the moon usually assumes in an eclipse, and it is stated in Josh. vii. 5 that 'the heart of the people melted, and became water.'

Accordingly, we find in the mouth of the most pious men statements which, if understood literally, would be the most shocking blasphemy. 'Awake! why sleepest Thou, O Lord?' cried the poet of Ps. xliv., meaning, of course, 'Why, O Lord, dost Thou not interpose to save us? Why art Thou like a man who is asleep, who does not perceive what is going on about him?' It is an instructive exercise indeed to collect those questions addressed to God which begin with the word 'Why'—*e.g.*, 'Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?' (Ps. x. 1); 'Why hast Thou forgotten me?' (Ps. xlii. 9); 'Why hast Thou cast me off?' (Ps. xliii. 2); 'Why drawest Thou back Thy hand?' (Ps. lxxiv. 11); and, most interesting of all from our Lord's

quotation of it, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' (Ps. xxii. 1). It is strange that, whereas no one would ever dream of understanding most of these questions literally, the last is not only so interpreted, but is made the basis for all sorts of arbitrary assumptions. There is no essential difference between the cry of our blessed Lord on the cross and His prayer in Gethsemane, 'O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' In both utterances we see the yearning of human nature to fathom the mystery of pain. The cry, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' means, when translated into the language of Gethsemane, 'Why is it that by Thy will this cup cannot pass away from Me except I drink it?'

It may be well to point out that Hebrew contains no equivalent to our word 'typifies' or 'represents.' Where we should say, 'This typifies such and such a thing,' the Hebrew says, 'This is such and such a thing.' Thus we find, 'The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel'; of the woman sitting in the midst of the ephah it is said, 'This is

wickedness'; and St. Paul says, 'This Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia,' where in each case we might give the sense by substituting the word 'typifies' for 'is.'

Another fruitful source of confusion to English readers is to be found in the peculiar Hebrew use of the word 'say,' which in many cases refers to inward saying, and corresponds in English rather to the word 'think.' In one place, indeed (2 Kings v. 11), it is actually so translated, Naaman's words, 'Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me,' being literally in the original, 'Behold, I said,' etc. In this passage it would not much matter if the literal rendering of the Hebrew had been left in the English versions, but there are many other passages where a less literal translation would give modern readers a far better idea of what is actually intended. Thus, for example, the phrase 'Thus saith the Lord' does not imply that God has objectively revealed Himself by a voice; it would, indeed, be more correctly rendered 'Thus thinks the Lord,' or, in plain English, 'This is the Lord's will.'

Another peculiarity in Hebrew speech, re-

flecting as it does a striking peculiarity of Hebrew thought, is personification. Whereas we think in individuals, a Hebrew thought in tribes and nations ; and the tribe or nation possessed in his mind such solidarity that he spoke of it as though it were a single individual. Thus in Judg. i. 3, in a piece of simple prose, we read, ‘ And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites ; and I will likewise go with thee into thy lot.’ If this passage stood alone, we should naturally imagine that we had a conversation between two individuals. In like manner the deputation sent in the days of Zechariah to inquire about the fast-days, though consisting of several men, speaks in the first person singular—‘ Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?’

It is true that in neither of these passages is anyone likely to make a serious mistake as to the meaning ; but there are other passages where a casual English reader is very apt to go wrong. Thus in Mal. i. 2 we read, ‘ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the

Lord ; yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste,' etc. Here an English reader naturally thinks of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, and he finds a stumbling-block in the assertion that Jehovah should have loved the one brother—altogether arbitrarily, as it would seem—and hated the other. In the original, however, there is no reference to two individual men, but only to two *nations*. Malachi's words may, indeed, be paraphrased somewhat as follows : ' You Israelites ask for a proof that Jehovah has shown His love to you. You may find such a proof in the different treatment which Jehovah has given to you and to your kindred, the Edomites. Jehovah has treated the Edomites as enemies, and has devastated their land ; and in thus punishing your treacherous foes He has shown His love to you.'

And if it is important in the study of the Old Testament to remember the Hebrew tendency to think in nations rather than in individuals, it is equally important to remember it in the New. We, who are accustomed to think of religion primarily as a

matter of the individual soul in relation with God, and as centred rather in the world to come than in this present world, must of necessity make most grievous mistakes if we apply directly to our scheme of religion passages of Scripture which refer to nations, not individuals, in this life. In Rom. ix. St. Paul meets the difficulty of those who could not understand how God could once have chosen the Jews, and could then have rejected them and chosen the Gentiles. The Apostle is speaking, not of the election of individual men to eternal bliss or everlasting damnation, but of the election of a nation for a special purpose in this world. We should keep free from many misunderstandings if we could only remember that in both Testaments religion is regarded as having primary reference to this life. That this should be the case was indeed inevitable in the Church of Israel, which possessed no dogmatic statement of the resurrection of the dead. In a Church of which Pharisees and Sadducees were alike orthodox members religious language would naturally be understood as having reference to this life.

The passage which I have quoted above from Malachi may be taken also as an illustration of another common peculiarity of Hebrew speech. I explained the words 'I loved,' 'I hated,' as meaning 'I have shown my hatred and my love,' the words 'hate' and 'love' being used not only of the internal emotions of love and hatred, but also of the visible outcome of those emotions. It is a common practice in Hebrew to represent cause and effect by the same word. Thus *pe'ullā*, which means primarily *work*, and is rightly so translated in Ps. xxviii. 6 (Prayer Book Version), means also that which is gained as the result of work, *reward* or *recompense*, in which latter sense it occurs in Isa. xl. 10, where the Revised Version has, 'Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him.' Similarly, *āshām* means *offence*, *trespass*, *fault*, and also the money compensation paid for such an offence. In like manner *hēt* denotes *sin* (literally, the *missing of a mark*), and then the consequences of sin, *guilt* or *punishment*. Another word from the same root, *hattāth*, meaning primarily *sin*, is regularly used to denote the *sin*

offering. The natural consequence of this combination of cause and effect in the same word was that the Hebrew frequently described external appearances or conditions in language which seems to us misapplied. Thus in 1 Kings i. 21 Bathsheba's words to David are translated, rightly enough as far as the sense goes, 'Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders.' The literal translation, however, of the Hebrew of these latter words is 'shall be sinners.' I might multiply instances of this usage from the Old Testament almost indefinitely, practically all words for *sin* and the like being used to express the consequences of guilt or misery, and words for *righteousness* being used to express the immunity from punishment of a man who would be declared innocent before a judge, whether Divine or human. But this mode of thinking is not confined to the Old Testament. A good illustration of it occurs also in the New Testament, in 2 Cor. v. 21, where St. Paul says: 'Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become

the righteousness of God in Him.' These words in the baldly literal translation of the English version are untrue; Christ never was made *sin* in the English meaning of that word, nor can it be said even of the highest saint that he is become God's *righteousness*. But from the lips of a man of Hebrew thought the words are absolutely true; Christ took upon Himself the consequences of sin, that we might receive those blessings which are the outcome of that righteousness whereby men may have full communion with God.

I have given the above illustration of the occurrence of this idiom in the New Testament first, because it was closely connected with the class of illustrations which I had selected from the Old Testament; but it is not an isolated example in St. Paul's language. Thus in 1 Cor. x. 4 St. Paul says of the fathers of Israel that 'they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them.' Here St. Paul is alluding to a quaint Jewish legend—probably not originally intended to be understood literally—which describes the water brought by Moses out of the rock as accompanying the Israelites through their journey in the

wilderness. The idea seems to have arisen from a fanciful interpretation of Num. xxi. 19, 20.* St. Paul uses the term *rock* in true Hebrew fashion to denote the water which flowed out of the rock; he calls it 'spiritual' (as he calls the manna 'spiritual meat'), by way of distinguishing it from water naturally given; and he adds, again making use of the Hebrew idiom, 'and the rock was Christ,' meaning, as we should rather express it, 'the water miraculously given to the Israelites in the wilderness was a *type* of Christ, the water of life.'

A further illustration of this tendency to denote cause and effect by the same word is to be found in the use of the word *redeem*, a word which belongs both to Old and New

* The word 'Mattanah,' which here appears as a proper name, may be pronounced so as to mean 'its gift'; 'Nahaliel' means 'torrent valley' (or, with a slightly different pronunciation, 'valleys') 'of God'; 'Bamoth' means 'heights,' from which the Targum, the old Jewish Aramaic paraphrastic translation, deduces the following edifying, but scarcely historical, lesson: 'And from the time that it [*sc.*, the water] was given to them, it went down with them into the valleys, and went up with them to the heights.'

Testament language. I need not enlarge on the pagan ideas which have been too often deduced from this word. We all know them, and shudder at them. I would point out, however, that such ideas proceed from an ignorance of Scripture, and are foreign to its true meaning. It is commonly asserted, rightly enough as far as that goes, that *to redeem* is to *buy back*, and accordingly, concentrating their attention on the actual transaction, men go on to discuss the price paid, and the person to whom it is paid; but it seems to be commonly overlooked that Scripture also contains the antithesis of the word *to redeem*, and that in this antithesis we may find the clue to its proper meaning. Thus in Deut. xxxii. 30 we read, 'How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?' and again in Judg. ii. 14, iii. 8, iv. 2, the Lord is said to have 'sold' Israel into the hand of various enemies. In order to understand the idiom, we must remember that in Bible times slavery was universal. We must not, however, base our ideas of this slavery on what we have

read in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' In a community where no one except the king possessed freedom in anything like the modern sense of the term slavery could hardly be as galling as to those accustomed to democratic ideas. Moreover, there are several indications in Scripture that on the whole the slave was better off than the poor 'hireling.' The latter was worked pitilessly till the end of his contract, and was paid a miserable wage, which was barely enough to keep body and soul together. The slave, on the other hand, was a member of his master's household, and, as a rule, was well fed and clothed, and frequently treated as one of the family, sometimes, indeed, becoming his master's heir. So long as he continued in the possession of a Hebrew master the slave had the protection of the law of Israel, which also fixed a term to his bondage. There was, however, one terrible catastrophe which might befall the Israelite slave, though forbidden by the law. The master might sell his slave to a foreigner, in which case the wretched slave, if ill-treated, had no protector to whom to appeal. Thus the statement that a man has sold his slave

means that he has ceased to be the protector of the slave ; and similarly the statement that the Lord has 'sold' Israel means that to all outward appearance the Lord has ceased to be the protector of Israel. There is no thought of the *transaction*, but only of the *status* of the slave. It never occurred to a Hebrew that his words would be understood to mean that the Lord took a price when He sold His people. As the poet of Ps. xlv. quaintly says, 'Thou sellest Thy people for nought : and takest no money for them.' In like manner in the use of the word 'redeem' the thought is not of the transaction, but of the altered *status* of the person bought back. As the Lord received no price when He sold His people, so He paid no price when He redeemed them. Who indeed could give a receipt to God ? The statement that we have been 'redeemed' by the blood-shedding of Christ means that our status is thereby altered, that we have been 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.'

Another idiomatic usage having a certain external resemblance to the one just described,

though by no means identical with it, is found in a tendency which we find among Hebrew speakers to represent sarcastically the consequence which they know must follow from a certain course of conduct, as though it were the purpose of those who pursue that line of conduct. Thus in Isa. xlv. 9 we read, 'They see not, nor know : in order that they may be ashamed,' where the prophet means that the blind, stupid policy of the idolaters can only end in shame, or, to give a better translation, disappointment. Similarly, Hosea (viii. 4) says, 'Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off.' It is unnecessary to point out that what Hosea knows must be the *result* of the making of idols, and which he sarcastically assumes to be the *purpose* of those who make them, since the result is so obvious to sane men, was never dreamed of by them. Here we have a sarcastic arguing back from certain results to their causes. In addition to such passages, however, there are many others which must not be confounded with them, where the use of the infinitive implies to English ears a final clause, but where there is

not in the original any final sense whatever, whether sarcastic or otherwise. In Hebrew the infinitive with the preposition 'to' prefixed is used not only, as in English, as a compound verbal noun, but also in cases where we should be obliged to use some other preposition. Thus the Hebrew word *lēmōr*, which is generally translated in our version 'saying' when it introduces the words of a speaker, is in reality the infinitive of the verb 'to say' with the preposition 'to' prefixed, and it is clear that in such cases it means, not 'in order to say,' but simply 'in saying.' In like manner *lēmāllē* may mean 'to fulfil,' 'in order to fulfil,' but also 'by way of fulfilment,' 'in fulfilling.' In the Jewish Aramaic, moreover, the vernacular of our Lord and His Apostles, the infinitive with the preposition 'to' is commonly used even where we should consider a subjunctive clause more natural; so that it is only possible to decide from the context whether, for example, the translation should be simply 'to do' or 'in order to do.'

Accordingly, men who thought in and spoke Aramaic would, on learning Greek, be disposed to use whatever phrase they might adopt as

the translation of some expression in their own vernacular with the same extended and ambiguous meaning as in the Aramaic original. Thus, for example, they would probably not distinguish accurately between ἵνα ποιῶ ('that I may do') and ποιῶν ('to do'), and if they adopted the former as the translation of their infinitive in the one sense, they would be apt to use it in the other also. But whatever the influences may be which have moulded Biblical Greek, whether the language of the New Testament represents the actual living tongue of Greek-speaking Orientals, as seems probable, or not, a study of the Greek Testament by itself is sufficient to show that ἵνα ('that') with the subjunctive does not necessarily possess a final sense, but corresponds rather to the Hebrew and Aramaic infinitive with the preposition 'to'; and if once this be admitted, a number of serious difficulties in the New Testament vanish. Sticklers for its exact classical sense land themselves in hopeless absurdities. In a number of passages, indeed, the most perverse ingenuity cannot make it anything else than the mere equivalent of the infinitive. Thus in St. John iv. 34

our Lord says, 'My meat is to do [*ἵνα ποιῶ*] the will of Him that sent Me.' Here I can only say that the translation of our English version appears to me to be faultless, and I am unable to follow Dr. Westcott's contention in his commentary upon this verse that 'the exact form of the expression (*ἵνα π.*) emphasizes the *end* and not the *process*, not *the doing* . . . and *finishing*, but *that I may do* . . . and *finish*.' I would point out that in his *paraphrase* Dr. Westcott has given to the passage exactly the meaning which it bears to the ordinary English reader: 'My true food lies *in working** for the fulfilment of my Father's will.' A somewhat similar usage is found in St. John xv. 8, where our Lord says, 'Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit' (*ἵνα καρπὸν πολὺν φέρετε*). It is surely evident that the meaning of our Lord's words is not that the Father was glorified in order that the disciples might bear much fruit, but that by the fruit-bearing of the disciples the Father would be glorified. So likewise in the words, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see [*ἵνα ἴδῃ*] My day' (St. John viii. 56), it is surely absurd to translate 're-

* The italics are mine (R. H. K.).

joiced in order to see.' That is putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance. The plain meaning evidently is that Abraham rejoiced *at seeing*, or *because he saw*.

An instance of a like idiomatic usage occurs in St. John ix. 2 in the question which the disciples put to our Lord about the man born blind: 'Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (*ἵνα τυφλὸς γενηθῇ*), which we may paraphrase as follows: 'Is the fact that this man was born blind a proof of sin in himself or in his parents?'*†

* The question whether the man himself sinned was probably not meant to be taken seriously, any more than the question of Nicodemus (St. John iii. 4). It was asked because the mere statement of it was sufficient to show that there was no real alternative to the question, Did the man's parents sin?

† The above examples of the non-final use of *ἵνα* were originally collected before the publication of Mr. J. H. Moulton's 'Grammar of New Testament Greek.' I am glad, however, to be able to quote from that work (p. 208) the following sentence: 'The careful study of typical sentences like Mt 10²⁵ 8⁸ (contrast 3¹¹) 18⁶, Jn 1²⁷ (contr. Lk 15¹⁹) 4⁸⁴ 15^{8. 13}, Lk 1⁴³ (for which Winer quotes a close parallel from Epictetus), will show anyone who is free from predisposition that *ἵνα* can lose the last shred of purposive meaning.'

I have dwelt at length upon this non-final use of *ʾa* by way of clearing the ground for the interpretation of a number of passages which present a serious stumbling-block to the faith of many. In several places in the Gospels it is stated that such and such a thing was done 'in order that' some particular utterance of prophecy 'might be fulfilled.' As a representative passage I may take the statement in St. John xvii. 12, 'Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.' To English readers these words suggest the terrible, and indeed blasphemous, idea that the son of perdition was made to perish in order to substantiate a Divine oracle delivered some centuries before, and that there would have been no necessity for his loss, had it not been for this most inconvenient Scripture. I said that such an idea was blasphemous, not only because it represents the character of God as diabolical rather than Divine, but also because it is directly opposed to the explicit teaching of Scripture itself. There is no *fatalism* in the Bible. We have the express testimony

of the prophet Jeremiah (xviii. 7-10) that God's promises and threats are always conditional, that it is only foretold that men will perish in order that they may *not* perish.

The words 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled' would be rendered in Hebrew simply by the words 'to fulfil [*lēmallē*] the Scriptures.' I have already pointed out that the Hebrew infinitive with the preposition 'to' is used to express ideas which we should express quite differently. The Evangelist's phrase, 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled,' means simply that the loss of 'the son of perdition' did as a matter of fact prove to be the fulfilment of Scripture. But 'the son of perdition' did not perish in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, any more than the parents of the blind man sinned in order that he might be born blind; but as the fact that the man was born blind might have been understood as the *result* of his parents' sin, so the fulfilment of the Scripture was the result of the perishing of 'the son of perdition.'

I do not, of course, mean to deny that our Lord affirmed that the Old Testament enunciated great principles which would find

exemplification in His own life and in the history of the Church. There is a Divine necessity that man should be made perfect through suffering. This is, however, an entirely different thing from the supposed necessity that certain events must have happened in a particular way simply to bring them into harmony with a description of them written some centuries before.

But though we may thus put away the most serious stumbling-block occasioned to modern readers of the Bible by the phrase 'that it might be fulfilled,' there yet remains another in the fact that the passages of Scripture quoted as having been 'fulfilled' seem in many cases to have nothing whatever to do with the event which is said to be the fulfilment of them. Instances are numerous enough, and it will be sufficient for me to mention two or three which occur in the first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. In St. Matt. i. 22, 23 the birth of our Lord is said to be the 'fulfilment' of the prophecy in Isa. vii. 14. In St. Matt. ii. 15 the flight of Joseph and Mary with the infant Saviour into Egypt is regarded as the 'fulfilment' of

Hosea's words (xi. 1): 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My Son out of Egypt.' In the next paragraph the massacre of the innocents is said to have 'fulfilled' Jeremiah's poetical representation (Jer. xxxi. 15) of Rachel, the mother of Israel, weeping in her tomb as her children pass by on their way into captivity.

In all these cases one thing is quite certain: the passage of prophecy quoted has in its original context an entirely different meaning from that assigned to it in the Gospel. If we study the Old Testament prophecies with the idea of interpreting them in their original connexion according to the New Testament references to them, the result can only be that they will appear to be not what, I believe, they really are—viz., the words of men by whom the Holy Ghost spoke to the world, but a collection of riddles more disjointed and far less reasonable than the Sibylline Oracles.

Before we indulge in such exegetical gymnastics as the attempt to explain the prophets by the New Testament quotations from them, let us first inquire whether we have rightly understood the New Testament

use of the word 'fulfil.' Many of our difficulties in the interpretation of the Bible arise from our narrowing down the sense of the original words to the meaning of those English words which have been adopted as their equivalents in translation.

In ordinary modern English the word 'fulfil' has acquired a very definite and limited meaning. We habitually use it only in connexion with promises or predictions, and we understand by it the carrying out in actual fact of the thing promised or predicted. . But the use of the Hebrew word *mallē*, of which *πληρῶν* is obviously a translation, has a much wider range of meaning, starting, however, from the original sense of making full. It may mean 'to make full or substantial,' 'to give actuality to' something which had previously existed only as an idea or as an unconfirmed rumour, or it may mean 'to make a thing full' by developing it, by raising it to the highest power of which it is capable. Thus, to give some illustrations from the Old Testament, Nathan is represented as saying to Bathsheba (1 Kings i. 14), 'Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also

will come in after thee and confirm [Hebrew *fulfil*] thy words.' Again, in Exod. xxiii. 26 we read, 'The number of thy days I will *fulfil*'; and in Isa. lxv. 20, 'There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled [lit. *fulfilled*] his days' —i.e., one who has not reached the full age which it is possible for man to reach. So, also, in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 20, 21 we find, 'And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: *to fulfil* the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, *to fulfil* threescore and ten years.'

Similarly, to turn to the New Testament, we have an instance of the wider use of the word 'fulfil' in the saying of our Lord recorded in St. Matt. v. 17, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but *to fulfil*.' Our Lord certainly did not attempt to 'fulfil' the law in the sense of making His own actions correspond exactly with all its

precepts. On the contrary, He emphatically declared that many of its precepts were incompatible with its highest teaching. But though He did not fulfil the law quite in the sense in which we now use the word 'fulfil,' He did *make* the law *full* by developing it and raising it, so to speak, to its highest power. He did for the law what, according to St. Paul (Col. ii. 10), He does for those who are united with Him: 'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him *ye are made full*,' or *fulfilled*. I would venture to suggest that this is the thought of the prayer in our own Communion Service, though the more literal sense is possible, 'that all we who are partakers of this Holy Communion may be fulfilled with Thy grace and heavenly benediction' (Ut quotquot ex hac altaris participatione sacrosanctum Filii tui corpus et sanguinem sumpserimus omni benedictione cœlesti et gratia repleamur).

Thus the statement that a certain passage of Scripture was fulfilled by an event does not necessarily mean more than that the words of such a passage are applicable to it. The sense of St. Matt. i. 22, for example, may be best

given by some such paraphrase as this : ' This great event may be described in the words which were spoken by the Lord through the prophet.'

It must not be forgotten that the lessons of Hebrew teachers were habitually based, or, to speak in Rabbinic language, hung on 'pegs' taken from the Old Testament, which both teachers and pupils well knew had no connexion whatsoever with the matter in hand. Indeed, a Rabbinic teacher allowed himself considerable licence in dealing with his quotation, if he could thereby make of it a better 'peg.' Let me give an illustration from the words of Rabbi Meir : ' It [*i.e.*, Scripture] saith, " And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables " (Exod. xxxii. 16); read not CHARUTH, graven, but CHERUTH, freedom, for thou wilt find no freeman but him who is occupied in learning of Thorah.* Rabbi Meir here takes advantage of the vowelless character of Hebrew writing to substitute an ē for an ā, thus changing the words 'graven upon the tables' into 'freedom was upon the tables.'

* See Taylor, 'Sayings of the Jewish Fathers,' p. 114.

Rabbi Meir certainly did not imagine that this was the proper meaning of the passage quoted from Exodus; he used it merely as being a valuable help to enable his pupils to remember the great lesson which he was inculcating.

The New Testament naturally does not contain an exactly parallel instance to the one which I have just adduced, for such changes in pronunciation would be meaningless to Greek readers, but it contains numerous illustrations of the practice of quoting phrases from the Old Testament quite apart from their context to illustrate the matter in hand. Thus, for example, in Rom. viii. 36 St. Paul introduces a quotation from Ps. xlv. 22 with the simple phrase 'as it is written,' which would be impossible to a modern writer. If the Apostle had been writing English he would have expressed himself rather as follows: 'In our case the words of the Psalm are applicable, "for Thy sake,"' etc.

I have said that the Rabbis were well aware that the quotations which they used as 'pegs' were not used in their proper and original sense. It is a great misfortune for the understanding of the New Testament that Rabbinic literature as a whole is treated by Christians

with a contempt which it does not deserve, and which is due to ignorance. A Jewish scholar was perfectly capable of discussing the historical interpretation of the Old Testament, the *pěshat*, as the later Rabbis call it ; but this seemed to him of minor interest compared with the *děrash*, the allegories and parables which might be read into, or founded upon, the words of Scripture taken out of connexion with their context. St. Paul's reference to the spiritual rock that followed Israel is a piece of *děrash*. If the Apostle had been asked to give an interpretation of Num. xxi. 19, according to the *pěshat*, or simple historical system of explanation, he would, supposing that he knew the sites of the places named, have drawn a map.

Of the fanciful application of the words of the Old Testament to illustrate a lesson, so common among the Rabbis, there are a considerable number of instances in the New Testament. I may mention in particular St. Paul's use of the story of Sarah and Hagar, and the reference to Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer seizes upon the circumstance that neither the father nor

mother of Melchizedek is mentioned, nor the dates of his birth and death, in order to represent him as a type of Christ.

In the case of the idioms discussed above the English reader is for the most part inclined to understand the words too literally ; there are, however, on the other hand, phrases which suggest an allegorical or spiritual meaning, but which in reality denote quite common and simple ideas. This is the case particularly with the use of the word 'son.' Hebrew possesses very few adjectives, but makes good the deficiency in this respect by a free use of the genitive relation. Thus 'image of gold' is the regular way of expressing 'golden image'; 'tree of fruit' means 'fruit-tree'; 'the planting of his amusement' means 'the planting with which he amuses himself'; and so forth. In many cases, however, an adjectival or quasi-adjectival expression is formed by the word 'son' followed by a genitive. Thus 'a year old' is expressed by 'son of a year'; 'son of a night' means 'grown in a night'; 'son of Belial' (worthlessness) means 'worthless'; 'son of death,' 'worthy of death'; 'son of beating,' 'deserving to be beaten.' Thus

'son of peace' naturally means 'worthy of peace'; so that our Lord's words in St. Luke x. 6, which in the Authorized Version are rendered, 'If the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it,' viz., the house—(which seem to make the presence of *Christ* in the house the condition of the efficacy of the Apostolic salutation)—should rather be rendered as follows : 'And if one who is worthy of peace be there, the peace which you wish him in your salutation will rest upon him.'

In like manner 'son of perdition' is not an allegorical name such as Bunyan gives to his characters in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' but a common Semitic way of describing a lost or abandoned man; the expression, 'the sons of the bride-chamber,' which is apt to suggest to English readers a reference to the Parable of the Marriage Feast, means simply 'the wedding-party.'

The number of *nuances* in this use of the word 'son' is almost infinite, and a little thought will generally show the correct meaning. In addition to this class of idioms, however, there is another common usage which is somewhat perplexing to English readers.

The members of a class, or nation, or corporation, or guild, are denoted in Hebrew by the use of the word 'sons.' Thus in Ezra ii. 42 we find mention of 'the sons [A.V. children] of the porters,' meaning simply the class or guild of porters. 'The sons of the prophets' are neither clergy orphans nor theological students, but members of the associations of prophets. The term 'sons of the captivity' (Ezra iv. 1) is used to denote the Jews who had returned from exile, as distinct from the population which had remained in Palestine. So the 'sons of Israel' are not the descendants of an individual Israel, but simply Israelites; the 'sons of Ammon' are Ammonites, and so forth. Similarly, since the Hebrew word *ēlōhîm*, generally translated *God*, may be either singular or plural, the phrase, 'sons of the *ēlōhîm*' which occurs in Gen. vi. 2, 4, and in Job i. 6; ii. 1, does not mean 'the sons of God,' but, as the latter passages show,* 'the gods'—the class, that is, of superhuman beings.

À propos of the word *ēlōhîm*, it may be well

* If 'sons of God' had been meant, the sentence would have run thus: 'When the sons of God came to present themselves before *Him*.'

to point out that in another set of phrases also the English versions suggest a wrong sense. Thus the term 'house of *ēlōhîm*' does not mean 'God's house,' but simply, to borrow an expression from pidgin-English, a *joss-house*; 'a man of *ēlōhîm*' does not mean 'God's man,' and still less 'a godly man,' but a man who is occupied with the supernatural world. There is no exact equivalent in English.

It will thus be seen that there is, if I may so express it, a *grammar* of the Bible, which must be mastered by those who would arrive at the true sense of the Bible. The word-for-word translation, which is due to a mistaken reverence for the *ipsissima verba* of Scripture, must inevitably mislead those who have no knowledge of the languages spoken by the prophets and by Christ and His disciples. May we not hope that in time to come we may have, as the outcome of sounder scholarship, and truer reverence, and firmer faith, a version of the Bible which will so set forth the meaning of the original, that those who know no language except our own manly and tender English may hear every man in his own tongue the wonderful works of God?

II

THE VISION OF GOD

‘Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.’—ST. MATT. v. 8.

AMONG the many preliminary difficulties which the modern English Bible-student must overcome, if he is to arrive at the meaning which the words of the Bible originally bore in the minds of those who wrote them, not the least consists in the utterly different conception of the scope and end of religion prevalent among modern Christians as compared with that which prevailed among those by whom the Bible was given to the world. It is not only in its modes of expression that English thought diverges so widely from Hebrew or Jewish thought. Something more is necessary than the mere translation of the idioms of the one into the corresponding idioms of

the other. We must try to forget that religious teaching which is not derived from the Bible (and the amount of such teaching is far greater than is commonly imagined), and think ourselves back into the thought of the times in which the Old and New Testaments were written.

Now, in thus combining together the Old Testament and the New, I have no desire to ignore the fact that from the one Testament to the other there is a great progress in thought. Whereas, for example, in the Old Testament religion is regarded almost entirely from the standpoint of the nation, in the New Testament stress is laid upon the relation of the individual toward his heavenly Father. Whereas Old Testament religion has to do exclusively with this life, in the New Testament we have presented to us an everlasting life after physical death. But it is very easy to exaggerate the difference between the two Testaments even in these respects. Although the individual is more prominent in the New Testament than in the Old, we shall grievously mistake its teaching if we imagine that religion is there treated only from the individual and not from

the national standpoint ; although the life beyond the grave is insisted upon, it is never taught that a man's whole interest should be concentrated on the state after death. Indeed, it may be said with perfect truth that the average modern Christian standpoint differs more from that of the New Testament than the standpoint of the New Testament differs from that of the Old.

It was, perhaps, almost inevitable that this should be the case. With the rejection of Christianity by the Jews, and the consequent transference of the oracles of God from those who, by nationality and language, were best fitted to be commentators on them to the Gentiles, who approached the study of them with no preliminary training, the Church suffered a most grievous loss, a loss the full extent of which has been but dimly perceived.

It was necessary that the Jewish branches should be cut out from God's olive-tree, in order that the ingrafted Gentile branches might have their growth and nourishment unimpaired. It was only by the final break with Judaism that the liberty of the Gospel was assured to the Church. It was, however,

with a great price that the Church obtained this freedom, a price which we believe will one day be repaid by the regrafting of the Jews back into the tree from which they were cut out. When the Christian Church is freed from the last vestige of Judaism, when it is no longer in bondage to ordinances, 'touch not, taste not, handle not,' when it has learnt that true religion is a matter of the heart and life rather than of ritual ordinances, that that which entereth into a man cannot as such either defile or sanctify him, that life eternal is to know the one true God, then we believe the time will have come for the nation which in God's providence was once rejected to be received back. And when they are received back, they 'who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came,' when the Christian Church is reinvigorated with the Jewish power of faith and with Jewish poetical intuition, there will be a second Pentecost; for 'if the casting away of them was the reconciling

of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead ?'

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of Hebrew or ancient Jewish religion as compared with modern Christianity is the fact that its chief interest, its centre of gravity, so to speak, is to be found in this world, and not in the world to come. In the early days of Christianity, owing, perhaps, to the terrible persecutions to which Christians were exposed, it was no wonder that those who had but newly learnt that there was a state of blessedness beyond the grave abandoned all hope for this life, and centred all their affection on the life to come. It seemed to them that this world was utterly, hopelessly, corrupt, given over to the Evil One ; that a Christian could have no part or lot in it, and that it became him, relinquishing all idea of happiness here, so to lay up treasure in heaven that he might finally attain to unspeakable joy. Accordingly, Christians were accustomed to read the Bible wholly absorbed in the thought of the hereafter—every promise they interpreted of the life to come, every woe would, they thought, be fulfilled at the final judgment

—with the result that the life of every individual has been commonly supposed to be divided into two parts, the first a mere preliminary to the second. The difficulty of making any hard-and-fast discrimination on earth between the good and the bad is, indeed, generally recognized ; but it has been commonly supposed that at the last day the gates of heaven will be opened to a certain number, to whom all blessings will be accessible, and closed to all others, who will receive the same measure of woe.

I believe that to the overwhelming majority of English Christians in the past, and to a very large number at the present time, the vital question in their religion is not how it will affect this life, but whether at the last day the gates of heaven will be opened to them or not. They love to dwell on the things which they believe God has prepared beyond those gates for them that love Him. They endeavour by piecing together various passages of Scripture to get some idea of what life in heaven will be. They try to describe with pen and ink, or to represent with colours and canvas, that which no man has seen or can see, the

life of those who, having escaped from the bondage of corruption, have passed into that spiritual kingdom which flesh and blood cannot inherit, and are as the angels of God which are in heaven.

But when we turn from what may be called traditional Christianity to the original documents of our faith, we find that this insistence on the hereafter to the exclusion of the present is a distortion of the doctrine once delivered to the saints. Though our blessed Lord explicitly affirmed the reality of a life beyond the grave, He declared it to be of a nature which we are altogether unable to imagine. His teaching, like that of the prophets, *is directed towards this present life*. Having regard to the beliefs of the time when He walked on earth, it is, I think, certain that His words would naturally be understood by His hearers as referring to this world, unless He expressly stated that He was speaking of the hereafter.

At the beginning of that great collection of our Saviour's sayings which we know as the Sermon on the Mount we have a number of beatitudes describing the various blessings

which will be received by the righteous ; and probably we are inclined, on first hearing these blessings, to refer them to the state of final blessedness. There is, however, nothing to show that our Lord was thinking of the state beyond the grave, and we may be sure that His hearers would understand Him to be speaking of this life. Some of these sayings, indeed, could only be understood of this life, as, for example, that which declares that the meek shall inherit the earth. It does not follow, of course, that, because words primarily refer to this world, they have no application to the world to come. What is essentially true in the world of spirit now may be regarded as true for the world of spirit hereafter. Only we must be on our guard that we do not, in drawing our lessons for the *future*, ignore those which are the more important, inasmuch as they belong to the *present*.

In the words of my text our blessed Lord points out the happiness of the pure in heart—happiness which consists in the fact that they shall see God. Now, whenever we hope to obtain something as a reward for what we

have done, we naturally ask not only what will be given to us, but *when* it will be given. In the language of our own homely proverb, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' a small reward punctually given is worth an infinitely larger amount promised for some indefinite future time. When, then, will the blessedness of the pure in heart be made manifest? Is it in this world, or in the world to come, that they will see God?

I suppose that most of us have at some stage of our thought loved to dwell upon our entrance into the life beyond the grave. We have imagined ourselves as clad in the white robes of God's righteousness, and entering through gates of pearl into the city of God. We have pictured, perhaps, the rapture of seeing with our eyes that which had before been known only by faith; we have looked forward to seeing the great white throne upon the sapphire pavement, where the King will reveal Himself in His beauty to all who are undefiled. That vision can never be realized as we once imagined, for the heaven which we pictured was a material local heaven, and the God of our imagination was but a glorified

earthly king. A better thing is promised us by Christ than the fairy scene of our childish dreams. And, moreover, we have not to wait for the realization of His promise, for, not only when they awake from the sleep of death, but now in the time of this mortal life, the pure in heart shall see God.

Among the Hebrews worship at the sanctuary was commonly described as 'seeing the face of Jehovah.' Doubtless that phrase had its origin in days when men gazed in wonder at the rudely carved serpent, or calf, which they were told was the representation of their God. But the phrase 'to see the face of Jehovah' remained in use long after all images had been abolished ; to worship at Jerusalem was in common parlance 'to see God,' even though no form or similitude was presented to the eyes of the worshippers. Jehovah would let Himself be seen, so it was thought, to all who sought Him on His holy mountain. When Isaiah went to worship at the temple he saw, not with his bodily eyes, but with eyes of faith, the King, the Lord of hosts.

Our blessed Lord promises, therefore, to all who are pure in heart that they shall see now,

in the time of this mortal life, not once in a lifetime, but as long as life shall last, the same vision which Isaiah saw, or, rather, a better vision than his. Isaiah saw Jehovah in His one aspect of the thrice holy King; but this is not the only form of His Epiphany. To the pure in heart revelation will be succeeded by revelation, glory will be followed by glory. With each successive advance in holiness God will reveal Himself as more holy; with every increase of love His love will shine with a brighter light; with each advance in truthfulness His truth will be manifested—the truth which, in spite of the faithlessness of men, endures unchanging on.

The clearness of the Divine Epiphany will be conditioned by the heart-purity of those to whom that Epiphany is granted. And purity of heart implies something more than freedom from grosser sins of thought. Perfect purity of heart can, indeed, never be attained in this life, for with progress in purity the knowledge of what true purity is will grow. When the greater stains—the stains which are vivid as scarlet—have been removed, then the lesser stains, which were before unnoticed, stand

out in glaring prominence. The baptism with the Spirit is a never-ending process ; with every washing our eyes are opened more and more to recognize what true purity means ; with each purification some aspect of the heavenly Epiphany comes out into clearer prominence—in proportion as we grow like God, so the more we recognize the character of God. Only when we are altogether like Him, can we see Him as He is.

In our generation men's minds have been much exercised on many questions of faith. New studies have brought into discredit old definitions. Old theories of revelation are untenable in the light of modern science and of modern antiquarian research. The old bibliolatrous view that the Bible is in every respect utterly unlike all other literature can no longer be maintained, and we have heard men anxiously asking whether, after so much has been taken away, anything remains—whether the Bible can in any sense claim to be inspired.

Now, we can only answer such a question by first giving some definition of what inspiration is ; and, I take it, we may briefly

define it as the God-given faculty of getting at the true inwardness of things, of seeing that which is Divine and eternal as distinct from that which is earthly and transitory. And if this is inspiration, then the recipients of inspiration are clearly indicated in the words of my text, 'Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.'

Inspiration is a relative, not a positive, term. The writer of the Book of Joshua, who advocated the ruthless slaughter of the Canaanites, though his teaching comes so far short of the Gospel of Christ, was *inspired* in the generation in which he lived. His heart was purer than that of his contemporaries ; his pitilessness he shared with them ; but he had removed from his soul one dark stain with which theirs still was dyed : he believed in a worship which consisted in whole-hearted righteousness, and not in foul orgies, and to this extent he saw God more clearly than his fellows.

The inspiration of Scripture is progressive. As one by one the stains were purged from the Church of Israel, so one by one fresh attributes of God were made manifest.

Generation after generation men saw God more and more clearly, until there arose a Man who, being made perfect, free from every spot of sin, saw God as He is. In Jesus Christ we have the promise of a perfect Epiphany. When by His grace we have purified ourselves, even as He is pure, then the revelation hitherto granted to Him only will be granted to us also. Then we, too, shall know the infinite blessedness granted to the pure in heart; we shall be like Christ, and shall see God as He is.

III

THE CHRISTIAN USE OF THE SCRIPTURES

‘Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.’—ST. LUKE xxiv. 25.

THERE are many features in the story of the walk to Emmaus which give it an almost unique interest in the Gospel narrative. It is to one of these in particular that I wish to direct your thought this evening, trusting that the lesson which we may learn from it will be of use to us in enabling us to find a solution, not only of some of those problems which are specially suggested to us on this Septuagesima Sunday, but also of those which will be brought before us in the lessons appointed for several Sundays to come.

I take it that, when we have tried, as I trust we all have tried, to put ourselves mentally

into the position of our Lord's disciples at the time of His crucifixion, our uppermost thought has been one of grief—grief both that One so dear should suffer such things, and that He should be taken away; and it is evident from the Gospel record that in these respects our Lord's companions and friends felt as we should feel. But St. Luke in his account of the events of that ever-memorable Sunday evening brings before us another feature in their trouble which we are, perhaps, inclined to overlook. The crucifixion of the Saviour not only pierced the hearts of all who loved Him by the contemplation of His sufferings, it not only deprived them of the sympathy and guidance of One on whose every word they had hung, it not only seemed to put a stop to every plan and hope for the future, but it aimed a blow at what had hitherto seemed as certain as God Himself, the Scriptures which they believed God Himself had given.

For those who had left all and followed Jesus had done so, it must be remembered, because they believed that He was the fulfilment of prophecy. The Old Testament

Scriptures were part of their very life. They had read them, and pondered over them, till they imagined that they had found the God-given programme of the things which were to take place in their lifetime. It did not occur to them that those Scriptures could be studied from two points of view. Their ideas about them were perfectly clear-cut. Their interpretation of them was perfectly definite. In answer to the question where was the Messiah to be born, for example, the Biblical scholars of the age of Christ answered, without hesitation or uncertainty, 'In Bethlehem of Judæa, for so it is written in the prophet.' It is probably hardly an exaggeration to say that, as we study the history of some man in the past, and try to reconstruct from such records as we have a complete story of his life, so the scholars of our Saviour's time had studied the future career of the Messiah who was to come, finding as they supposed all the details of His life in the Scriptures. And this story of the Messiah, which they thought had been written by anticipation in the Old Testament, represented Him as a mighty King, who should go forth conquering and to

conquer; One who should rule the Gentiles with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. The Jewish Biblical students saw no other side of the picture which they had thus mentally drawn. They had never contemplated the possibility of the rejection of the Messianic King by those who should have been His subjects. That He should be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, that He should be smitten and wounded unto death, had never occurred to them as remotely possible.

And thus to the disciples' natural grief at the death of their Master was added the horror of a terrible dilemma. They had followed Jesus believing Him to be the Christ. They had told Him whom they believed Him to be, and He Himself had declared that their belief was right, and that He was the long-expected Messiah; but now His death had falsified, as it seemed, all the Old Testament Scriptures. Could it be that He had imposed upon their credulity in declaring Himself the Messiah? Could it be that He who seemed the truth was really

fraudulent? And if, on the other hand, they strove to be loyal to the memory of their Master, how were they to explain the Scriptures, the teaching of which appeared so clear and explicit? They seemed to be confronted with the awful choice of giving up their Bible, or giving up their Lord.

And yet in the horror of their dilemma, though they saw no way of reconciling the contradiction between their Scriptures and the death of Jesus, they held fast to both. Mistaken, as they were, in the true meaning of the Scriptures, they yet could not bring themselves to acknowledge that they were not inspired; on the other hand, though their Master had been crucified through weakness, they still felt that the power of God had been manifested in Him. They could not see the real way of escape from their dilemma, because it had never occurred to them that their way of looking at Scripture, or their interpretation of it, could be wrong.

But because the disciples who set out for Emmaus on that great Sunday evening were humble, teachable, loyal, and truthful, they were not left in their agony. They had

proved their faithfulness to their Master in that they were not ashamed to confess to a perfect stranger, as it seemed, the fact that they had been His disciples. Notwithstanding so much that seemed to point to imposture on the part of Jesus in calling Himself the Messiah, they still would trust Him. They believed in His truthfulness, though all things appeared to point to His deceitfulness. And according to their faith it happened to them. The contradiction between what the prophets had written and what Jesus had suffered, which, when they set out from Jerusalem, had seemed overwhelming, at Emmaus was all removed. Now they were shown that it was not the Scriptures that were at fault, but the interpretation which had been put upon them. Here they had been wrong almost from beginning to end. 'Fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written': the words were a stern rebuke indeed to men to whom the Bible had been part of their very life. All their old ideas about it now were changed; all their old interpretation was broken down. They gave up what they themselves had believed about the Bible, and

that which their fathers had told them ; and as their reward they received the vision of the living Christ.

On this Septuagesima Sunday we have begun to read the Old Testament from the beginning. In the first lessons appointed for to-day's services we have three accounts of the creation, two in prose, one (that in Job xxxviii.) in poetry, and we naturally ask what lesson we can learn from them.

I suppose that most members of this congregation—at any rate, all those over forty—have been trained as children to regard the Bible as literally and historically true ; and it has therefore been a great puzzle to many to know how to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the Biblical account of creation and the teaching of modern science. Thus geologists and astronomers, notwithstanding their difference of opinion as to the age of the world, are unanimous in asserting that the earth was not made in six days ; and, indeed, the evidence which they offer to us on this point is overwhelming. Again, it is asserted in Gen. i. that the sun, moon, and stars were made after the earth, whereas nowadays we

are taught to assign to our own planet a very inferior position.

It is true that various attempts have been made to remove these contradictions, but it must be admitted that they are all absolutely unsuccessful. It is asserted, indeed, that the 'days' of creation are in reality vast æons. But surely such a supposition is made impossible by the statement which is made with reference to each of these supposed æons, 'And there was evening and there was morning.' What possible meaning could there be in the statement that an æon (some millions of years) had an evening and a morning? Surely it is evident that the man who wrote these words believed in an ordinary day of twenty-four hours. Again, in a book which was a class manual when I was at school, the contradiction between the Bible and science as to the date of the creation of the sun and stars was removed—at all events, to the satisfaction of the author—as follows: he argued that the creation of the sun merely meant that the light of the sun reached the world on the fourth day, and he insisted that as regards the stars it is merely stated that God *made* them, and not

when He made them. But, as a matter of fact, what the Bible states in the clearest possible way is not that the light of the sun reached the world on the fourth day, but that the sun itself was created on the fourth day ; and if the division of the work of creation into six days means anything at all, it is impossible to separate the creation of the stars from that of the sun. Such attempts to explain away clear definite statements have done an infinite amount of harm. They make men wonder whether Christians really care for truth.

But there is another fact to be taken into consideration, though it has too often been ignored by those who have tried to explain away the account of the first chapter of Genesis. The statements of the first and second chapters of Genesis are themselves mutually contradictory, and even if by mis-translating some of the statements of the first chapter, and putting an unnatural meaning upon others, the history of creation there contained be brought into harmony with science, it is still impossible to harmonize with it the story of the second chapter. Thus, to give

but one illustration (and I could give many), whereas in the first chapter man is made after all other created things as the climax of creation, in the second chapter first Adam is made, then the animals, and lastly the woman. It is true that our English version rather softens down the discrepancy, but in the original Hebrew the story can bear only the meaning which I have put upon it.

Now, the explanation of these discrepancies in the Biblical accounts is due to the fact that the Book of Genesis, like most of the narrative portions of the Bible, is a compilation. It consists of three main documents blended together. Sometimes we find a fairly long section from one of these documents followed by a long section from another; sometimes a few verses of one, or even a few words, are interwoven with portions of another. The proof of this assertion belongs rather to the lecture-room than to the pulpit, but I may say that anyone who cares to give a few hours' study to the matter may, even with the English Bible, learn to separate for himself one document from another, when once he has been put in the way of so doing. In

making this statement I am not giving you what is merely my own private opinion, but the judgment of almost all modern scholars, which has been the official teaching of the great English Universities for years.

I may point out that the second document incorporated in the Book of Genesis begins in the middle of verse 4 of chapter ii. In the first document the Creator is called God ; in the second the LORD God, or, as it is in the original Hebrew, Jehovah God. In point of date the document from which the second chapter is taken is earlier by some centuries than that which has supplied chapter i.

But if the Bible contains statements which cannot be reconciled with one another, it is obvious that some of its statements, at all events, are not historically true, and it is this discovery which has filled with dismay many a godly soul.

But the Bible does not pretend to be a history book. Again and again its writers quote from history books which existed in their days, but they do not quote what to a modern historian would be of the highest value. What would we not give for a com-

plete account of Solomon's reign ! But what says the compiler of the Book of Kings ? ' And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon ? ' The fact that he deliberately abstained from quoting a history which he had shows that his purpose was not to write history, but rather to show how through the ages God had dealt with Israel. And if we remember this in reading the Book of Genesis, if we read it not to find mere history, but to learn the truth of God, we shall have no desire to exclude Genesis from the books of Holy Scripture. Regarded as *history*, of what value are the Saviour's parables ? Do you suppose that any king ever acted as the king who made a supper for his servants ? Do you imagine that any servants would really have so treated such an invitation ? Yet, if the parable of the supper is worthless as history, as an illustration of God's dealings with men it is of priceless value. And, to turn from the Gospels to the Old Testament, of what historical value to us is it to know that by the ford of the Jabbok a man wrestled with Jacob all night ? But

when we read the prophet Hosea's interpretation of the story, when we know that the wrestling of Jacob represents the wrestling of a man in prayer with God, we find in the story food for our souls.

As our blessed Lord showed that the prophets were not at fault, but that men had wrongly interpreted them, so He has, I believe, shown us, not that the Scriptures are at fault, but that our use of them has been wrong. And if we will only accept His teaching—teaching which has come to us by many a discovery in Bible lands, to say nothing of the advance of science in our own country—we shall find, not that the Bible means less to us, but that it means infinitely more. We shall be able to trace out little by little God's revelation to the world. We shall see Him speaking by divers portions and in divers manners through the prophets, raising men on the stepping-stones of their disappointed hopes to higher things, leading them on from one belief to another, from glory to glory, till at length the purpose of God in creation was realized, and the Man Christ Jesus was in God's image after His likeness.

‘Fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written.’ My brethren, the words are applicable to us also. We are apt to exalt, it may be, tradition above the truth. Is it not a humbling thought that if less than a hundred years ago the whole Christian Church had given a pronouncement on the Old Testament—I do not mean one branch of the Church only, but Greeks, Romans, and Protestants of all denominations—it would have unhesitatingly condemned as untrue what we know to-day to be true?

The Saviour has not left us comfortless. His Holy Spirit is with us to guide us into all truth. The nearer we draw to Christ the dearer will the Scriptures which He loved be to us. Only let us be loving, reverent, and truthful, and the perplexity which the new views of the Bible have perhaps caused us will issue, as did the perplexity of the disciples at Emmaus, in a clearer perception than before. The Saviour who has led us hitherto will not forsake us now. There is much that is still perplexing, much that we cannot understand, but we know that our Redeemer liveth; we

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have felt His healing touch, and know that He is mighty to save. Now, indeed, we see as in a mirror darkly, but one day we shall see face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we have been known.

IV

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

‘When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.’—ST. MATT. xxv. 31, 32.

It is probable that between the two covers of the Bible there is no passage which has more powerfully influenced mankind than the great parable from which my text is taken. It may, indeed, be said that, when taken in conjunction with another great parable—that of the Prodigal Son—it sums up the whole of our Lord’s teaching. And, like the parable of the Prodigal Son, it arrests attention by the beauty of its language; only, whereas there we have an exquisite picture of family love, here we have a scene which for its dramatic force is

worthy of being classed with the masterpieces of Hebrew literature—a scene painted with the fewest possible strokes and the utmost self-restraint, which nevertheless makes us feel that behind all the seeming contradictions of this life there is a power that judges ; that,

‘ Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind
exceeding small ;

Though with patience He stands waiting, with exact-
ness grinds He all.’

And yet, considering the great number of people who acknowledge the authority of this parable, and who are thrilled by the majesty of its language, it would, I think, be idle to deny that the teaching of a judgment to come has to a great extent lost its hold upon men. With the change which has slowly but surely come to pass in the views of earthly judgment—I mean in the justification and the nature and the purpose of the punishments which men inflict on their fellow-men—there has come about also a change in the way in which men regard the punishments inflicted by the heavenly Judge. It was commonly held at one time that punishment was retribution, a tit for tat ; that the criminal was sentenced in order to

pay him out for the crimes which he had committed. And since we can only think of God in human language—that is to say, by earthly metaphors—it is little wonder that men came to picture God's dealings with men according to their own crude ideas of retribution. They pictured God as a judge arbitrarily pronouncing sentences of vengeance. As they thought almost exclusively of the community to be protected from the criminal, and scarcely at all of the criminal himself, so they imagined the Everlasting Father as lavishing His goodness only on the righteous, devoting the ungodly to eternal perdition, and caring not that they perished.

Now, it is usually the case that, after the truth has been in any way distorted by the undue emphasis or misrepresentation of one side of it, when men first perceive their mistake, they go by the swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the other. Shocked by the hardness, I had almost said the cruelty, of the character of God as it was once depicted, men have in our days gone almost to the extreme of denying His justice. In lieu of the loving Father of the Prodigal Son, who, not-

withstanding his yearning for his son, did not restore him till he had set his face towards home, saying, 'I will arise and go to my father'—in lieu, I say, of a God who combines love with righteousness, they have too frequently imagined a God possessing love without righteousness. In denying the one attribute they have virtually denied the other also, for love without righteousness cannot exist. That which under such circumstances passes for love is a miserable travesty unworthy of the name.

And therefore it is of the utmost importance that we should give due weight to the teaching of the Saviour which tells of judgment. A man has missed an essential part of the revelation of Christ unless, like the psalmist of old, he says, 'Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth.'

But though we cannot pay too diligent heed to the teaching of our Lord on this subject, we ought to remember the limitations of the form in which that teaching was given. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that a parable is an allegory, and that no allegory can be pressed in all its details. Let me give an illustration from the great English allegory which, not-

withstanding some great faults, ought to be, and, I trust, is, familiar to most English-speaking religious people. Christian is there represented as fleeing from the City of Destruction, and unable to stop any length of time upon the road, lest he should perish. But at every stage he finds upon the road servants of the same King whom he seeks (such as the Interpreter, for example), who are not pressing on to the Celestial City, but staying continually in the same places to help pilgrims, and who must therefore be liable (if we press the allegory to its logical conclusion) to be swallowed up at any moment in the disaster from which Christian is fleeing. Now, of course, there is no one so stupid as to object to Bunyan's great parable on these grounds: the inconsistency is inseparable from the nature of the allegory.

In the case of our Lord's allegories, however, men do make the mistakes which they would never dream of making with reference to the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' They treat our Lord's language as though it had been intended to give theological definitions rather than practical lessons for everyday life. This

is probably due in no small measure to the fact that we do not sufficiently study the Bible historically—that is, we do not take sufficient care to find out what meaning the words of Jesus would naturally bear in the ears of those to whom they were first addressed.

Nowhere is this more necessary than in the case of those sayings which seem to deal with a future state. Whereas Christian attention has long been concentrated on the life beyond the grave, it was very different in the community in which our Saviour laboured. When He was born, the idea of a life beyond the grave was a comparatively modern one. As far as we can judge from the literature which we possess, two hundred years before His birth such a thing was undreamed of. Even in His days the belief in a resurrection, which was indeed general among the Pharisees and the more spiritually minded Jews, was still rejected by the priests, the Sadducean faction, who clung to the old idea of religion which limited God's dealings with men to this present life. And in justice to the Sadducees it must be remembered that no one dared to accuse them of heresy. They differed from the

Pharisees as one section differs from another even in our own Church, but the belief in, or the denial of, the resurrection was generally considered to lie outside those things which were of crucial importance for membership of the Jewish Church. In these days it is difficult to imagine even a simple creed which would contain no reference to the life beyond the grave. But the Jewish Church has, strictly speaking, no creed at all (unless the statement of God's unity can be said to constitute a creed), and certainly there was no article on the subject of the resurrection of the dead. It is true that since the time of the Maccabean rising this idea had been held as a basis of faith by many of the best men in Israel, and had been put forth in a number of allegories or parables ; but, though one allegory writer borrowed from another, and allegorical language accordingly tended to become crystallized, men had not lost consciousness of the fact that it was allegorical. They used, indeed, phrases which were familiar to them from the allegories, just as we might borrow phrases from the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' but they did not intend to be understood according to the literal mean-

ing of their words. If a modern preacher refers to the Slough of Despond, for example, or the Hill of Difficulty, or the Valley of the Shadow of Death, no one supposes that he means that there actually are such places through which the soul must pass. In like manner, when a religious teacher of the time of our Lord quoted phrases from parables or allegories, he did not intend to be taken too literally. If he represented true believers as seated at supper next to their father Abraham, he did not mean to imply that the life to come would be a never-ending meal. If he pictured the dead bodies of those who had fallen in fighting against God's saints as flung into the Valley of Hinnom, the common receptacle of the rubbish of Jerusalem, there to be burned so as not to be an offence to the living, it was obvious even to a child that it would be as impossible for all the ungodly literally to be flung into the Valley of Hinnom as for all the saints literally to be gathered together to worship in the Temple at Jerusalem. It must be remembered that neither Hebrew, the language of the prophets, nor Aramaic, the language of our Lord, has a word for either

heaven or hell in the sense which those words commonly bear in modern times. The word which is commonly translated hell, *Gehenna*, is nothing but a Græcized form of *Ge Hennâm*, the Aramaic equivalent of *Ge Hinnom*, the Valley of Hinnom.

It is not quite certain which of the two valleys west of the Temple hill is to be identified with the Valley of Hinnom; it *may* be the valley which ran up into the city immediately to the west of the Temple courts. In any case, however, the valley was at least as well known to our Lord's hearers as, for example, the Ely Railway Station to the inhabitants of the City of Ely. It must not be forgotten that when Jesus spoke of the Gehenna of fire, He could probably, if He was speaking in Jerusalem, point to the actual Valley of Hinnom and to the actual fires which were there consuming the rubbish.

And therefore such phrases as 'the Gehenna of fire,' 'Abraham's bosom,' and the like, are to be understood in the same way as we understand such phrases as 'the Slough of Despond' or 'the Hill of Difficulty.' They are not theological technical terms, but poetical

metaphors. Our Lord was never presented with a clear-cut definition of all that lay beyond this life and asked to pronounce upon it. Though He affirmed in the plainest terms the existence of a life to come, He refused in the most unmistakable way to define or describe it in any way. In His words, 'There they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God,' He lifts the inquiry into the nature of the state hereafter into a region where our minds are unable to follow. And if He affirms of the just nothing beyond the fact that their souls are in the hand of God, His teaching as to the future state of the ungodly is not more explicit. For dogmatic definitions of such things we search His words in vain. 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed'—the life of the knowledge of God and of communion with Him—'belong unto us and to our children for ever.'

Let us, then, read this great parable from which my text is taken, not with inquisitiveness or with unspiritual dogmatism, but humbly and reverently, with the expectation

that we shall find a practical lesson for the time of this mortal life. And first of all I would call your attention to the opening words: 'When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.' The imagery is taken, as we know by the use of the phrase 'the Son of man,' from the great allegory of Dan. vii., where 'the Son of man,' who is said to typify 'the people of the saints of the Most High God,' the kingdoms of this world having spent their force in vain against him, receives a kingdom which cannot pass away, and a dominion which cannot be destroyed.

It is remarkable that this triumph of the Son of man was represented by our Lord as fulfilled, not in the final triumph when He shall have put all enemies under His feet and abolished the last enemy, death, but in His crucifixion. When the high-priest put to Him the question, 'Art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed?' He replied, 'Thou hast said: nevertheless, I say unto you, henceforth shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of

heaven'—that is, if I may venture to paraphrase the Saviour's words, 'from this time onward, in the fact that My gospel is so true, so powerful, that it can survive My shame and My death, in the fact that I know that the truth will be vindicated even though I refuse to come down from the cross, you will see, though you will recognize too late the meaning of what you see, the fulfilment of the hope of Daniel's allegory, the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.'

When the glory of the Son of man is consummated, there is consummated also the division between those who have been loyal to Him in His humiliation and those who have spurned His claims.

'Every eye shall then behold Him
Robed in dreadful majesty.'

But the division between the sheep and the goats, like the glorification of the Son of man, is not a momentary work, but a gradual one. It was not a sudden change of heart which made those who on Sunday had cried 'Hosanna' on the Friday shout 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!' Every time that they had

turned a deaf ear to the Saviour's earnest declarations that His kingdom was not of this world, every time that they had allowed their minds to dwell on the peculiar honour over and above their fellow-men which they might obtain by following Jesus, they had been widening the unseen division which was separating them from those who were willing to follow Him even to death. It needed but the great crisis to make the division clear and manifest. When He, whom they had welcomed as their king, was mocked, and spit upon, and crowned with thorns, the secret wish of their hearts was revealed. Jesus of Nazareth could not be their Saviour. Barabbas was the type that they desired.

And as it was in the days of Pontius Pilate, so it is in our days. The true Light which lighteth every man still is coming into the world. The same division which went on unseen nineteen centuries ago is going on unseen now. In the life of every individual, in each generation, in every nation, there is some touchstone, unnoticed, unheeded, carrying out the work of division, parting, as a shepherd parts the sheep from the goats, those

who believe from those who disbelieve, those who love from those who hate, those that are pure from those that are filthy, those that love the truth from those that love and make a lie.

Yes—

‘To every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or
evil side.’

There is not a schoolboy but is brought at some time or other in his school life into the presence of a more noble, a more truthful, a purer standard, which he must either strive to attain to or deliberately reject ; there is not an apprentice who does not go out of his apprenticeship either better or worse than at the beginning, but in no case the same ; there is not a man of business who, in the conflict that business presents between honesty and the love of gain, does not become nobler and truer or baser and more false ; there is not a politician who is not brought thereby either nearer to the saint or nearer to the criminal. Everywhere the great Shepherd is dividing up His flock, while the flock itself is unconscious of His presence. Only when the unexpected happens is the division clearly seen ;

only in some great crisis are the followers of Jesus—Jesus, the despised and rejected of men—known to be separate from the adherents of Barabbas.

My brethren, have we yet made our choice between Jesus and Barabbas, between the crown of thorns and the crown of this world? Are we putting honesty before honour, purity before self-gratification, brotherly love before social advancement? Let us take a review of our lives since last Advent, and ask ourselves—aye, and not only ask ourselves, but with all honesty answer the question, Have we during the past year been passing towards the right hand of the heavenly Shepherd or towards His left hand? Is there within us more that is fit for the kingdom of heaven, or more that is unfit for aught save to be burned amid the worthless rubbish of the Valley of Hinnom?

Thus it will be seen that this great parable has a very real present lesson for each one of us, the lesson which is summed up in another place by Christ Himself in the words, ‘Who-soever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation,

of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father.' If we reject Christ in His humiliation, we have no part in His glory. It is the way of the Cross that is the way of light. Calvary is the gate of heaven.

The ultimate fate of those who pass to the left hand we do not know. Christ has not told us. We cannot understand how any sin can finally frustrate the purpose of God's love; but this is a matter beyond our ken, one of the secret things which belong to the Lord our God.

But, stern as this parable is, it is not without some comfort. I take it that we have, most of us, known some who, quite honestly, as far as we in our limited knowledge can tell, though they have earnestly sought the truth, have found themselves unable to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and their God. Are they, then, altogether cut off from the possibility of God's grace? Nay; surely it is not straining the teaching of the parable to draw from it the lesson that not all the blessed have *consciously* served the true Messiah? In the great award there are those who are

amazed to find that what they have done in love's name, not confessing Christ, has, nevertheless, been done to Him. 'Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

V

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

‘And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives over against the Temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?’—ST. MARK xiii. 3, 4.

It is recorded in the Gospel that when certain of the scribes and Pharisees asked our blessed Lord to give them a sign, He replied: ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas’; whereas in the chapter from which my text is taken we find Him readily responding to a similar request, and granting a sign, or, rather, a series of signs.

As a matter of fact, however, the sign asked for by the four disciples differed very materially from that which the scribes and

Pharisees demanded. The latter were asking, not for a sign which would guide them in the application of the words of Jesus, but one which would mathematically demonstrate to them, apart from the exercise of their own faith and reason, that Jesus was a supernatural teacher, on whom they could throw all the responsibility for their acts, if they departed from the traditions of the elders. They demanded, indeed, nothing less than a miracle which would compel assent—a miracle which would abrogate faith. Had their request been granted, had Jesus given them no option but to believe Him, He would have deprived them of the most ennobling faculty which man possesses, the power of choice; they would have lost the status of free men, and would have become slaves. The very desire to obtain that which was so out of harmony with the revealed will of the God whom they professed to worship showed that their heart was not whole with Him. They were false to the covenant of faith; they were an adulterous generation.

The case of the four disciples, however, was altogether different. They needed no faith-

compelling miracle, for they had accepted Jesus as their one guide and teacher. Though they might misunderstand His teaching, they had absolutely no doubt as to its authority. They asked for a sign, not in order to obviate the necessity of faith, but rather to make their faith more definitely operative in their lives.

The disciples' question was occasioned by the declaration of our Lord, spoken shortly before, that of all the Temple buildings there should not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down. It was a declaration so terrible, so almost incredible, as it seemed, when judged by ordinary human probability, that we cannot wonder if the disciples were startled. We can, perhaps, imagine what our feelings would be, if we heard from some one whose words carried conviction that not one stone of this holy and beautiful house in which we are privileged to worship should be left standing ; and yet, much as this great church is to us, to the Jews the Temple of Jerusalem was far more. To them the Temple was the symbol of Jehovah's abiding presence among His people. It was the only place where the Sacraments of the

older dispensation could be celebrated. The thought of its overthrow suggested the rejection of Israel itself.

But though our Lord's words were well calculated to appal those who heard them, they were implicitly believed. The disciples asked, not for a sign to prove that these things should come to pass, but only that they might have some indication of the *time*. They were prepared to watch and wait, if only the watching and the waiting might be of any avail.

I said that our Lord answered His disciples' question by giving, not one sign, but a series of signs, and we should therefore have expected that the practical application of these signs by the Apostles to their own time would have been simple. As a matter of fact, however, the signs given by our Lord seem at first sight calculated rather to blind men to the coming crisis than to enable them to recognize its approach. For side by side with plain and unmistakable references to the siege and capture of Jerusalem and its consequent horrors, we find signs which apparently imply the destruction of the whole physical

universe, so that the modern reader is in doubt whether this chapter refers to the destruction of Jerusalem or to the end of the world. Indeed, it is probably correct to say that it is understood to refer both to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the end of the world.

How, then, are we to account for the fact that we have combined in this chapter sayings which refer to an event that took place some forty years after they were spoken, and sayings which seem to refer to a universal destruction, which has not yet come to pass, and which, as far as our scientific knowledge goes, is unlikely to come to pass—at all events, in our lifetime?

An explanation which has been commonly given is that in prophecy there is no perspective, and that it is therefore impossible to distinguish between that which is distant and that which is near. A little thought, however, is, I think, sufficient to show how unsatisfactory this explanation is. It will be generally conceded that, if it was desirable that the Apostles should have a picture of the future at all, it was equally desirable that that

picture should be a faithful representation of the future ; but it cannot be said that a picture without perspective is a faithful representation of anything. Many will, perhaps, remember a picture drawn by the painter Hogarth to show the absurd mistakes which might be made by one who set the science of perspective at defiance. In this picture the signboard of an inn in the foreground hangs behind a tree on a hill in the background, and the whole composition is rendered ridiculous as being a drawing of that which is impossible. There never could be a landscape corresponding to Hogarth's picture. In like manner, if there be no perspective in prophecy, if the grouping of the incidents described is impossible, the whole value of prophecy as a picture of that which is to happen is nullified. If our Lord described the destruction of the physical universe as accompanying the destruction of Jerusalem, there is no escape from the conclusion that He Himself was under a misapprehension. So strongly is this felt by many scholars at the present day that they seek to escape from the difficulty by supposing that the references to the darkening of the sun

and the falling of the stars, and the like, were not spoken by our Lord Himself, but were introduced into the record of His words by those whose minds were steeped in Jewish apocalyptic literature, and who therefore, in so doing, distorted the original teaching of Christ.

It will thus be seen that if the common interpretation of these sayings is correct, the Church is on the horns of a dilemma: either we must suppose that our blessed Lord Himself was mistaken in giving a description of that which He Himself declared to be in the knowledge of the Eternal Father alone, or else His words have been so seriously garbled as to be, at least in this case, of very little practical value to Christians.

Now, it may be freely admitted that in many places in the Gospel we have not got the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord. Though, doubtless, there are many sayings which have come down to us substantially the same as when they fell from His lips, in numerous cases we have only the gist of what He said. That this must be the case is clear, when we reflect that teaching, which occupied several

hours, is often compressed into a few verses, which can be read in as many minutes. Moreover, the variations in the Evangelists when they record the same incidents or sayings should be a warning to us against a too slavish adherence to the letter.

But though there is room for criticism in the Gospel story, as there is in the Old Testament, and in Church tradition, and in every good thing under the sun, to reject all those verses which seem to refer to the end of the visible world as an interpolation into the words which Christ spoke concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, would be a most arbitrary proceeding. For they occur not only in St. Matthew and in St. Luke, but also in St. Mark, and they are therefore among the best attested of Christ's words; and the fact that very similar sayings occur in numerous other apocalyptic writings is no argument against their having been really spoken by Christ. We have no reason to suppose that He was unacquainted with the religious literature of His time. If, as is probable, He definitely refers to sayings contained in the Talmud, is it unlikely that He should

refer to some of that apocalyptic imagery which, for better or worse, had taken so strong a hold upon the imagination of His hearers?

Assuming, then, that the chapter of which my text forms part does substantially represent the actual teaching of Christ, how are we to explain it? Are we to take refuge in such counsels of despair as the assertion that there is no perspective in prophecy? or are we to imagine that our Lord was induced to give a detailed account of that of which He admitted that He had no knowledge, and that in so doing He made a serious mistake?

The two alternatives have only to be stated to be rejected. We must look for another way of solving the difficulty.

In the first place, we have the words of our Lord in English by a double translation. There is clear evidence from the Gospels, not only from St. Mark and St. Matthew, but also from St. John, that Jesus habitually spoke and, I think we may say with all reverence, *thought* in Aramaic, which is a language bearing about the same relation to Hebrew that English bears to Dutch. But as the New Testament was originally written in Greek, it

is evident that we have in it, not the actual words used by our Lord, but a translation of them into Greek, so that our English version is a translation of a translation. Now, every one who has had the slightest experience in translating from one language into another knows quite well the difficulties which beset the translator, particularly when the second language belongs to a people who in modes of life and methods of thought are altogether different from those who spoke the first. In such a case it frequently happens that a mere literal turning of the words of the original will altogether fail to give its sense. It may sometimes happen that in one language two ideas are expressed by the same word, whereas in another they are expressed by two different words. Let me give an illustration. It is recorded that our blessed Lord said on one occasion, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me' (St. John xii. 32), and the Evangelist adds, 'This He said signifying by what manner of death He should die.' But to an Englishman the being lifted up does not suggest death at all—certainly not death by crucifixion. It is only

in the Jewish Aramaic that the word which is commonly used in the sense 'to lift up' has the technical meaning 'to crucify.'

Again, it may happen that two words may, when used alone, each correspond fairly well to two English words, and yet, when combined together, may denote an entirely different idea. Thus the Hebrew word *leb* does roughly correspond to the English word *heart*, and the Hebrew *tób* to the English *good*; and yet in Hebrew, when the two words are put together, they do not in the least denote what we should understand by a *good heart*, but merely *merriment*.

It will thus be seen that, if Hebrew or Aramaic words are to be made intelligible in a language so utterly different as English, a very literal translation is out of the question. A very large number of the difficulties which the ordinary English reader finds in the prophets and in the New Testament are due to the desire of translators to find a rendering for each word rather than for the sense of the whole.

Now, when a Hebrew wished to compare one thing with another, he frequently said

that the first thing *was* that to which he wished to compare it. If, for example, he wanted to compare the redness of the moon during an eclipse to blood, he said that the moon was turned into blood. If he wanted to describe the power and majesty of an earthly potentate, he described him as the 'daystar son of the morning.' It was quite unnecessary for him to say expressly that he was speaking in metaphors, for his hearers did not expect him to speak in any other way. If you will carefully read such a passage as Isa. xiii., for example, where the prophet speaks of the stars of the heaven failing to give their light, of the darkening of the sun and moon, and of the shaking of the earth out of its place, you will see that these things are not to be understood literally, for it is obvious from the latter part of the chapter that the world will go on *after* all this in the same way as before. The destruction of the physical universe is not thought of. The darkening of the sun by an eclipse is a phenomenon which fills even the scientific beholder with awe, the savage with terror. The figure of an eclipse is therefore introduced to show

the general panic which will accompany the downfall of the Babylonian Empire.

We must never forget how different our Lord's conception of prophecy was from that of His contemporaries. Indeed, His use of the whole of the Old Testament differed fundamentally from that of His generation. As an interpreter of the Old Testament Scriptures, quoting them in their proper meaning without the fantastic interpretations of the scribes, He is unique—do you wonder at it?—not only in His own generation, but in many centuries. We are therefore justified in interpreting His words according to the natural sense of the Old Testament prophecies to which they refer. On this principle of interpretation—and I venture to say that it is the only reasonable one—the difficulty in reconciling our Lord's words with the actual event altogether vanishes. As a prophet could say that the sun should be darkened, and the moon should not give its light, and the stars should fall from heaven, when he was thinking, not of the destruction of the universe, but of the passing away of one phase in the human government of this world, so Jesus could use

similar images as signs of the crises, which in His language are described as 'the coming of the Son of man.'

But perhaps it may seem to you that, even if this be the case, the consideration of it belongs rather to a Cambridge lecture-room than to the pulpit of a church. To such a criticism I would answer that the right interpretation of this long description of the coming of the Son of man ought to have for us something more than a mere academical interest. We are reminded that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning. The signs, which Christ gave to His disciples to guide them in their generation, are the same signs which He gives to us, to you and to me, to guide us in our generation. We, too, must ask, if we are in earnest, the same question which they asked, 'When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?' The coming of the Son of man is the crisis which brings us nearer to God, or leaves us farther from Him. Well may we ask, 'What is the sign of this crisis?'

And must we not admit, if we take these

words of our blessed Lord in the sense which they naturally bear to a student of prophecy, that the signs described by Jesus are taking place now upon this earth? Have we not seen the stars fall from heaven? Does not every year that passes bring some instance of the fall of a great one—of potentates who have lost their power? of the rich who have lost their wealth? of the strong who have lost their strength? of the living who have lost their life? and, saddest of all, of the honourable who have lost their good name?

Or, again, have we never experienced the darkening of the sun? As during an eclipse the bright light of the sun fails, and a horror of thick darkness seems to threaten the world, have there not been also in our experience times when the light of our life has seemed to have failed—times when there has come to us no cheering ray, when we have felt alone in the chill darkness of doubt?

Or, again, have we never known times when the earth has been shaken out of its place—that is, in the language of the Hebrew poets, times when the moral government of the world has seemed out of gear, when the religious

have appeared to have all the woe, and the irreligious all the good things ?

Have our hearts never failed us for fear at the sight of the sea and the waves of trouble ready to overwhelm us ? Nay, are not all these signs things of common experience ? Do we understand, then, that they are signs—signs that, for better or worse, we are approaching a crisis in our lives ; signs that the night is past, and that the dawn is now breaking ?

What says the Saviour ? ‘When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh.’

To all who love the Lord Jesus Christ the signs which strike terror into the hearts of the ungodly are signs of redemption. There can be no redemption except after struggle, no life except after birth-pangs. Is not the redemption of Israel out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage, the type to all time of our redemption out of the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God ? As it was with them—first the march through the desert, then the nightfall of

agonizing doubt and dread, with 'the foe behind, the deep before,' then the parting of the sea, and the illumination of the way, and the conviction that salvation was indeed nearer to the people than when they had first believed—so will it be with us : first the darkness and the dread, the loneliness and the agonizing, our hearts failing us for fear; and then, by the grace of God, the abiding presence of our Saviour, screening us from the scorching blast of persecution, lighting up the blackness of the valley of the shadow of death; and then the song of Moses, that song which shall be the hymn of the redeemed for ever and ever : 'O sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously.' 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the praise.'

VI

DIVES AND LAZARUS

‘But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.’—ST. LUKE xvi. 25.

It may be laid down as a general principle of interpretation that our blessed Lord’s parables contain each one main lesson, and one only. I do not, of course, mean to assert that there are absolutely no secondary lessons to be found in them. Considering the interrelation of different aspects of the truth, we must admit that it is difficult, if not impossible, to teach any one thing explicitly without at least implying others. But when a teacher is trying to fix one lesson in the minds of his audience, it is obviously unfair to make deductions from his language as to other points which are not at the time present to his

mind. Thus, for example, in our Lord's parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants the great lesson that is inculcated is the retribution which sooner or later must come to all. We have no right to argue from the details of the parable that our Lord considered a slave-owner as justified in inflicting the barbarous punishment there described. It would be strange indeed if He, to whose teaching alone is due the mitigation of the unspeakable tortures once inflicted on criminals, approved of a flogging so violent that it was described as a *cutting in two*.

In these days, perhaps, we are in no great danger of making deductions from such details as to the right conduct of modern society; we are no longer inclined to attempt to justify the outcome of our own cruelty and vindictiveness by an appeal to the words of Jesus; we frankly recognize that in such matters the details of the parables of our Lord may be compared with the details in the parables and fables of other teachers. But, unfortunately, just where it is of great importance to our faith to remember this principle we too often forget it; on the subject of the unseen world

we too often quote phrases of the parables as though they were articles of religion, drawn up in precise theological language, and assented to by the Church of Israel.

We shall make grievous errors in reading the New Testament unless we keep clearly in mind the great difference between ourselves, the heirs to many ages of Christian teaching interpreted according to Western thought, and those devout Jews to whom the Saviour spoke His parables.

There are many points in which this difference is clearly marked, but time forbids me on the present occasion to mention more than one. Whereas to the majority of Christians the interest of religion is centred in the world to come, to men of Hebrew thought it was this present world with which their religion was wholly occupied. There is probably nothing more difficult for us, whose whole conception of religion is bound up with the resurrection of the dead, than to sympathize with those who combined a fervent piety with the belief that the dead could not praise God, and that they who went down to the grave could not hope for His truth.

I do not, of course, mean to deny that there were many people in our Saviour's time who believed in the resurrection of the dead. But the doctrine was a comparatively new one; in so far as it had been taught at all, it had only been taught for some two hundred years, and, moreover, it had never been accepted by the Church of Israel as a whole. In the days of Christ and of His Apostles, Sadducees, who said that there was no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, and Pharisees, who confessed both, were alike orthodox members of the same Church. So long as a Sadducee faithfully observed the law in his ministrations and practised righteousness, no one questioned his right to be a priest of the Lord, even if, like many a prophet and psalmist before him, he did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

And thus in our Lord's time there was no definite theological language in which to describe the world beyond the grave. The hopes of those who believed in a life to come had found expression only in popular allegories and apocalypses, in which the blessedness of the righteous and the terrible

retribution which would overtake the ungodly were set forth now under this figure, now under that. And although the writers of these allegories borrowed largely from one another, the use which they made of the figures which they had in common was by no means uniform. The illustration which one popular writer used to express his ideas of retribution in the world to come might be used by another writer to set forth his views of the rewards and punishments which he expected to be given in this world. The primary purpose in each case was not the discussion of abstruse questions, but spiritual edification; to convince men that godliness even with persecution was better than ungodliness, and that though the clouds and darkness of oppression and wrong might seem to hide God from the eyes of men, yet righteousness and judgment were the habitation of His seat.

It will thus be seen that, when our blessed Lord placed the scene of a story in the world beyond the grave, there was little danger that those who heard Him would understand literally the details of His allegory. Indeed,

the very form of the allegory was incompatible with such an interpretation ; for when our Lord used the illustration of a banquet, no one, not even the most gluttonous and unspiritual, could imagine that He pictured eternal life as a never-ending eating and drinking.

Accordingly, in the parable from which my text is taken, we have no right to press the details of the story into a service for which they were never intended. We have no more right to assume that, because the scene of a portion of this story is laid in the unseen world, it must therefore correspond in all its details to the facts of that world, than we have to suppose that, when our Lord describes a punishment inflicted by an earthly king, the form and extent of that punishment are held up as a model for our imitation. Jesus of Nazareth was not the first teacher in Israel who had taught by parables, nor the first who had placed the scene of such parables in the supernatural world. In the vision of Micaiah the son of Imlah, in the heavenly court described in the first chapter of the Book of Job, as well as in other passages of the Old

Testament, the invisible world is treated with the same amount of freedom as the visible. The message of a Hebrew prophet often fell on deaf ears ; but, at any rate, he was spared one difficulty which frequently besets the modern preacher : he could at least use a metaphor without any fear that he would be understood literally.

And therefore, since the purpose of this parable was not to prove the resurrection of the dead to those who denied it, but to convince those who were lovers of money that it is better to be rich towards God, we have no right to use it, and in so doing to spoil its sublime lesson, to decide on matters which were not in question at the time when it was spoken. To attempt to make such a use of it is as though one were to try to dig up a garden with a silver spoon, of which the only result would be that the spoon would be made useless for its original purpose, and the garden would be but unsatisfactorily dug.

If our blessed Lord had never expressed any definite statement as to the reality of life after death, there might be some excuse in trying to deduce from His teaching on other

subjects His views on this. But the reality of life after death is affirmed by the Saviour in words so plain and explicit that they could not be misunderstood ; only at the same time, be it remembered, He described that life as something utterly beyond the power of men to imagine, as an existence like that of the angels that are in heaven.

To attempt, therefore, to deduce from this parable a description of the state hereafter is to disregard the express teaching of Christ. It is enough for us to know that there is a life to come—enough for us to know that the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and that there shall no torment touch them—without endeavouring to pry into those mysteries which our Heavenly Father has kept in His own hands. Though we cannot see through the grave and gate of death, we know that, since God has ordered it, we pass thereby to a joyful resurrection. We know that all things hereafter will be ours, because we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Putting aside, then, all fantastic speculations as to the nature of the life hereafter, let us consider the teaching of this parable for us.

We must take notice of its details in so far as they serve to bring out its main lesson ; we must try as far as may be to put ourselves in the position of those who heard the parable from our Saviour's lips.

I need not dwell on the description of the rich man. He is evidently a type of many rich men in the days of the Saviour. There is no hint that he was in any way what would have been considered a bad man. We are told of no vices. His sins are characteristic of the class to which he belonged.

At the gate of the rich man lay a beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

It is often brought as an objection against the teaching of this parable that Lazarus seems to be rewarded simply as a sort of compensation for his previous poverty, and that nothing is said of any special virtue or merit on his part. But, as the story was originally told by our Lord, this objection would not be felt. For whereas the rich man is left nameless, the beggar is designated by the name Lazarus, which, as all our Lord's

hearers knew, means 'One whom God helps'; so that it is implied that the beggar was not *merely* a beggar, but one who put his trust in God, one whom God helped. Moreover, the idea of poverty being rewarded simply as such was repugnant to the Jewish ideas of justice. Though the Old Testament Scriptures contain the sternest denunciations of those who accepted the persons of the rich, it contains also the reiterated precept, 'Thou shalt not favour a poor man in his cause.'*

We have, then, in that part of this allegory in which the scene is laid on earth, a picture of two men, the one conventionally religious, rich, faring sumptuously at his banquet, and the other poor in this world's goods, but putting his trust in God, laid at the gate of his rich brother, and gazing from a distance at the evidences of a banquet in which he could have no share, from which, indeed, he was separated by a great gulf of conventionality and selfishness.

Then the scene shifts to the world beyond the grave. Lazarus, having died, has been 'carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.'

* Exod. xxiii. 3; cf. Lev. xix. 15.

It is a most unfortunate thing that idiomatic phrases of the original languages of the Bible have frequently been so literally translated into English that in many cases they do not in the least suggest to English readers the original meaning. The phrase 'Abraham's bosom' is one of these. It does not in the least suggest to English ears the meaning which it bore in the minds of our Lord's hearers. In the time of our Lord and His Apostles the Jews—at all events the respectable classes—did not sit round a table at a meal as we do. Instead of chairs wide couches, generally holding about three people apiece, were placed round three sides of a large square table. The position of the chief places seems to have varied with the number of the couches, but, whichever couch was considered the place of honour, those who reclined upon it would be placed as follows. At one end of it, supporting himself upon his left elbow, would be the principal guest, whose feet would not lie close to the edge of the table, but would be turned away from it towards the wall of the room, so that between them and the table there would be room for the man who reclined

next on the right, whose feet would in turn be placed behind the back of the third person on the couch. The second person on the couch was said to recline 'in the bosom' of the first person, and the third person in like manner 'in the bosom' of the second ; and thus the phrase to be 'in the bosom of a person' meant simply to be placed at his right hand at a feast. At the Last Supper St. John was placed at our Lord's right hand, and by slightly bending back he was accordingly able to place his mouth close to our Lord's ear. If the phrase 'reclining in Jesus' bosom' had only been translated, as it means, 'seated at Jesus' right hand,' painters would never have represented St. John in the attitude of mawkish sentimentality with which we are too familiar.

The statement, therefore, that Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom simply means that Lazarus was placed by angels, at a banquet, in a place of honour at the right hand of Abraham. And as the position of Lazarus is reversed, so is it also with the rich man. He died and was buried. And in hell—*Hades*, that is, or *Sheol*, the place of all

departed souls—he who once fared sumptuously every day is now in torment. The nature of the sufferings of the rich man is not stated. We need not, however, think of *tortures* such as those that have been perpetrated in the Tower of London or on Smithfield, for the corresponding verb in the Greek is used to describe the sufferings of those who are sick—for example, one severely paralysed. Nor is the subsequent reference to the flame incompatible with this interpretation, for flame is commonly used as a metaphor for fever or feverish passion. The essential feature in the description of these two men in the unseen world is the complete reversal of their relative positions. He who at one time had treated the beggar at his gate with the utmost disdain, who would have felt himself defiled if he had so much as touched him, would now gladly have received at his hand some crumb of comfort ; his suffering would be alleviated if but one drop of Lazarus' cup of happiness could be vouchsafed to him. But it was impossible. The same gulf, which the rich man had made no attempt to bridge over in his lifetime, separated him now from

the man whose happiness he envied. He is reminded that he has had, as long as it has been possible for him to enjoy them, all the things which he has cared about. 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst *thy* good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'

The latter part of this parable—namely, the rich man's request for a special mission to his father's house—is, like the second part of the parable of the Prodigal Son, virtually a second allegory having its own lesson, and time forbids me to speak of it now. But I would ask you for a few moments to consider the lesson which the first part of the parable has for us. As I have said, we are not to understand our Lord as teaching that the rich man was punished simply because he was rich, and that Lazarus was comforted simply because he had been poor. The explanation of the reversal of the circumstances of the rich man is found rather in those words, 'thy good things.' In his lifetime—the only time when he could receive them, since 'flesh and blood cannot enter into the kingdom of God'—the

rich man had received *his* good things, namely, to be clad in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day. All his happiness had been centred in carnal enjoyments. He had never disciplined his soul to learn that it is more blessed to give than to receive. He had never cared for the Bread of Life, but only for the bread which perishes. He was as incapable of receiving pleasure from spiritual things as a man without an ear for music is incapable of enjoying a difficult classical composition. The words which the Saviour used of those who did their righteousness to be seen of men were true in his case also: 'he had received his reward.'

The chasm which separates those who are of the earth earthy from those who have set their affection on things above cannot be crossed. However much the saint may pity the sinner, he cannot dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue. Take the case of the degraded profligate drunkard, whose abject misery makes you long to help him, if only you could. Between you and him there is a great gulf fixed, which only God of His infinite love can bridge over. He has put

himself beyond your help, save such help as is given by the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man.

What are *our* good things? Are they such things as can be enjoyed only in this world? things which satisfy the body, but cannot satisfy the soul? Have we set our mind on carnal things, or on the things which are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God? Let this great parable of the rich man and Lazarus be the touchstone to apply to our own hearts. 'To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'

VII

THE CHURCH'S FREEDOM

‘He said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: so that the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’—ST. MARK ii. 27, 28.

ON the first day of this year our thoughts were directed to our blessed Lord's obedience to the law for man. In the second lesson appointed for this morning's service* we read of two occasions on which He was accused of lawlessness. That accusation is to us preposterous, but it did not seem by any means preposterous to those who heard it made. It is evident that there were many who were attracted by the personality of Jesus to whom His attitude towards the Sabbath was somewhat of a stumbling-block.

It is probable that we who have been

* St. Matt. xii. 1-22.

brought up in England have some difficulty in seeing the Sabbath controversy in its right proportions. Although unofficially, and through misapprehension, Sunday, the first day of the week, has been commonly identified with the Sabbath, the seventh day, yet in the lifetime of the present generation, and south of the Tweed, the observance of Sunday, even in the strictest households, has differed so much from that of the Jewish Sabbath, that it is not easy for us to see the Sabbath question with the eyes of our Lord's contemporaries. To us our Lord's treatment of the Sabbath appears eminently reasonable. To the men of His generation it appeared not only unreasonable, but subversive of true religion. It is evident, therefore, that the principle on which our Saviour's obedience to the law was based was different from that which underlay Jewish obedience. If, then, we can get a clear view of these opposing principles, we shall learn a lesson, not only as to the observance of holy days, but also of all law.

Of one thing we may be quite certain: we shall not add to our Saviour's glory by misrepresenting or unnecessarily belittling the

character of the men who opposed Him. Some of those, at least, who took umbrage at our Lord's behaviour on the Sabbath were spoken of with respect by St. Paul in his Christian days. Every Pharisee was not necessarily a hypocrite; every lawyer was not necessarily a hair-splitting casuist, delighting in puerilities.

I suppose that the Christian conception of religion may be briefly defined as communion with a God who has revealed Himself as a loving Father by the manifestation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To the Jew, on the other hand, religion appeared to be rather communion with a God who had revealed Himself by the law of Moses. What the Lord Jesus Christ is to us Christians, that the law of Moses was to the orthodox Jew of the time of Christ. As it is our aspiration to grow up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so it was the aspiration of the pious Jew to conform in all respects to the law, or, as St. Luke puts it, 'to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' It was, perhaps, almost inevitable under such circum-

stances that men should study the law with a minute attention to detail which was fatal to the apprehension of the great principles of right which it embodied. It was not that the scribes and Pharisees (I refer not to the hypocrites among them, who are always to be found in every religion, but to the sincerely religious men, who were numerous)—it was not that they were wilfully disloyal to the great principles of the law, but that their method of looking to its details rendered them incapable of seeing its general effect. Since they regarded the law as all given by God, they did not, for the most part, perceive the relative importance of the various commandments, nor did they endeavour to trace out the principles underlying them. Their great object was to ensure that no commandment should be passed over. They carefully counted the exact number to be kept, and arrived at the conclusion that there were 613: 365 negative commandments, 'Thou shalt not,' or one for every day of the year; 248 positive commandments, 'Thou shalt,' or one for every bone of the body.

Thus it may be said of the majority of

religious Jews of the time of Christ that their object was not to mould their lives according to some few great principles, but to keep 613 distinct commandments. Some great men, it is true, were exceptions to this general rule. Thus a generation or so before the time of Christ Rabbi Hillel had summed up the whole law to an impatient proselyte in the memorable words quoted in a slightly different form by our blessed Lord Himself: 'What thou wouldest not have thy neighbour do unto thee that do not thou to thy neighbour: this is the whole law; all the rest is commentary; go, study.' But among men of less spirituality and genius than Hillel the idea of religion was not to work out a great principle, but to avoid transgression of a number of more or less distinct commandments.

The inevitable result was that men lost all sense of proportion in the precepts of the law. They failed to distinguish between that which embodied some great moral principle and that which was a mere rubric. The man who transgressed, for example, such a precept as that which forbids the boiling of a kid in its

mother's milk, was regarded as equally guilty with the man who had committed some offence against his neighbour. St. James puts the Jewish idea of transgression very clearly when he says that 'whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is become guilty of all.'

It was, however, no easy matter even for the most zealous upholder of the law to determine exactly what its commandments were. This is a fact which we are very apt to overlook, and in consequence we not unfrequently pass an altogether unjust judgment upon the Jewish Rabbis. It is now admitted by practically all competent scholars that the law of Israel, like the law of all other nations, was a gradual growth, and was not all the work of one law-giver. Every one who has had the slightest experience in drawing up fresh regulations, or in amending old ones, knows how extremely difficult it is to make sure that there shall be no inconsistencies between the new regulations and the main body of rules or laws to which they are appended. When every care has been taken to ensure uniformity, it will often be found in the practical application of the

new rule that some contingency arises in which it breaks down altogether.

If, then, it is a matter of common experience that inconsistencies occur in laws drawn up by men who are on the look-out to avoid them, it is evident that in such a law as that of Moses, consisting of several quite distinct codes, there must of necessity be discrepancies and contradictions.

Let me give an illustration. The law of the Passover, as given in Deut. xvi., ordains that the victim shall be taken either from the flock—*i.e.*, from sheep or goats—or from the herd—that is, it may be a calf. It is also ordered that it is to be boiled, in accordance with the oldest custom of cooking sacrificial flesh. Unfortunately, this latter detail is obscured in the English Version, which here translates the word 'boil' as 'roast.' But in Exod. xii. it is enacted that the Passover victim is to be a lamb or a kid; nothing is said about a calf; and boiling, the only form of cooking specified in Deuteronomy, is expressly forbidden. Obviously under such circumstances the pious pilgrim who wished to avoid transgression in keeping the law of the

Passover needed some guidance on the subject. If he acted solely according to the requirements of the law of Exodus without taking account of Deuteronomy, he incurred the risk of transgressing the law as it was there given, and of bringing upon himself guilt in the sight of God. This is but one instance of many where two laws contain actual discrepancies ; but in addition to these there were numerous cases, as in our own law, where the exact application of the law to some particular contingency was uncertain.

It is therefore obvious that a body of skilled lawyers was an absolute necessity in the Church of Israel. Nothing is more unreasonable than the contempt which is so frequently expressed by Christians for all the Jewish Rabbinical lawyers. When lawyers are engaged in determining exactly what the meaning of a law is, their discussions will frequently appear as foolish hair-splitting in the eyes of those who do not recognize the issues at stake, and who are accustomed to settle every question which may arise in their own lives by a rough-and-ready rule of thumb.

Now it must be admitted that the Fourth

Commandment, regarded not as a general principle, but as a law binding upon all alike, by its prohibition of all manner of work at once demands some definition of what is work. In Christian households in which the Commandment has been by common consent applied to the keeping of Sunday, I have known very different opinions held as to what constitutes work, or how far various forms of recreation are permissible. In one household, for example, it is considered that there should be no cooking on Sunday; in another it is maintained that the Sunday dinner should be the best in the week; in one family all toys whatsoever are forbidden to the children on Sunday; in another some toys are forbidden and others allowed. We cannot, therefore, wonder that, if among Christians there is room for such differences of opinion, among the Jews, to whom the loyal keeping of the law was a matter of spiritual life or death, the question, What is work? was discussed with the utmost earnestness and with extraordinary care for details which appear to us of no importance. It is the custom to ridicule the Rabbis, but there is nothing ridiculous about

their conclusions, if we grant their premisses. Whatever be thought of their definitions, it may at least be admitted that they were severely logical in their arguments.

If we bear these things in mind, we shall the better understand the genuine amazement with which the Pharisees watched the disciples of Jesus, unrebuked by their Master, plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath day, and rubbing out the grain in their hands. Such an act was well within the Rabbinical definition of work. That the disciples, plain and ignorant men as they were, should be unaware of this definition, probably did not cause the Pharisees much surprise. The latter would regard them as belonging to the rabble that knew not the law. But that Jesus, whom the disciples addressed as Rabbi, should be ignorant of the true definition of work, or, if He knew it, should set it aside, was in their eyes a grievous scandal. We can scarcely blame them for calling attention to it. Thinking as they did, their question was a natural one: 'Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?'

It is not improbable that they expected

that Jesus would answer their question by some subtle discussion of what it was that constituted work. Considering that the great Rabbinical teachers not unfrequently came to very different conclusions, it is likely that, had He done so, they would have been mollified, even if not convinced. But Jesus did not attempt to argue the question whether plucking and rubbing out ears of corn constituted work or not. He met their objection on other ground, by showing that the breaking of the letter of one commandment may, under certain circumstances, be justified, if by its breach the object of the law as a whole be secured. Since it was generally agreed, as, indeed, it is explicitly stated in the Old Testament, that God delights in the *life* of men rather than in their *death*, our Lord based His argument on this principle. He declared that it was more in accordance with God's mercy towards men that David should eat the shewbread, which under ordinary circumstances was unlawful to him as a layman, than that, observing the strict letter of an isolated precept, he should perish with hunger.

If we had been among the Pharisees who

were scandalized by our Lord's tolerance of His disciples' laxity, how should we have met this argument of His? Should we not probably have retorted that the case of the disciples was not quite on a par with that of David and his men? The latter were in dire distress for lack of bread; whereas the disciples, though they might have been somewhat hungry, could at no risk of life or health have waited without the scanty amount of food which they obtained by rubbing out a little grain. This is the objection which naturally suggests itself to our Lord's reference to the precedent of David; and inasmuch as He has not allowed it as an objection, we are enabled, I think, to extend still further the principle on which He argues. God's mercy goes beyond the preference for the mere life of man to his death; not only does God not desire that men should die: He will not have their life unnecessarily afflicted. He takes thought for the comfort of men, as well as for their deliverance from death. This is the principle by which the law of the Sabbath must be interpreted. The Sabbath was ordained by a God whose desire is for mercy rather than sacrifice;

therefore, it was intended not to add to men's burdens, but to lighten them; 'the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'

This same principle was still more emphatically laid down by Jesus in the next incident recorded in the Gospel, the healing of the man with the withered hand. This man was not in pain. Since it was Sabbath, the inability to use his arm was not keeping him back from any useful or necessary work. It would, as far as we can see, have been possible for our Lord to seek him out early on the following morning, or even to speak the word from a distance by which he might be healed. Surely this was a case in which, if ever, the objection might fairly be made, 'There are six days in which men ought to work: in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.'

The fact, therefore, that our blessed Lord deliberately and without actual necessity did that which He knew was most objectionable to the prejudices of the religious leaders of His time may be taken as evidence that He desired in the most emphatic manner possible to

vindicate a principle which was being set at naught by Rabbinic rules. It was not only the man with the withered hand whom Jesus determined to free from his infirmity. He designed to give to His whole Church also freedom from those traditions of men, which of necessity collect about all law and threaten, if the Church be not watchful, to bring it into the bondage of Judaism.

‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’ How are we to apply this principle to the life of the Christian Church?

There are many Christian ordinances to which our Saviour’s words may be applied, but I will ask you to bear with me only while I refer to one. The Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, was it ordained for man? or was man made for it? Let us make sure that we do not so overload Christ’s ordinance with the traditions of men, that what was intended for man’s refreshment becomes instead a burden. If, for example, a man finds that by fasting his flesh is subdued to the spirit, so that he can better enter into communion with God, by all means let him

communicate fasting ; but if he finds that to come fasting endangers his health, or makes that which should be a spiritual delight into a bodily weariness, he is more loyal to the principles of Christ if he takes food beforehand. No one considers it tolerable that a man should come surfeited or drunken to the table of the Lord ; but St. Paul did not think it advisable that he should come hungry.

And the same principle which should decide whether we should partake of the Lord's Supper fasting or otherwise will decide also the hour at which we should take it. It was instituted, be it remembered, in the evening, and no commandment was given as to the time at which it should afterwards be celebrated. There are some who prefer an early morning hour. If they have the opportunity of coming then to the holy table, by all means let them come. But there are many who can only attend an early service by foregoing rest which they most sorely need. The Eucharist was appointed for man, and not man for the Eucharist. When we are inclined to define so very straitly the limits of time in which a man may be made one with Christ and

Christ with him, let us not forget that when this same Christ once healed a woman of her infirmity, the ruler of the synagogue in which the healing took place answered and said to the multitude, 'There are six days in which men ought to work : in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath.' Let us not say, 'There are so many hours out of the twenty-four in which men can be made one with Christ and Christ with them : in them, therefore, let them come and be healed.'

'With freedom did Christ set us free'; let us 'stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage.'

VIII

THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS

‘Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them : whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.’—
ST. JOHN XX. 23.

THERE can be few moments in the life of any man of more thrilling solemnity than that at which the candidate for Priest's Orders receives his commission. The authority committed to him then is one which seems to transcend the prerogative of man : ‘Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven ; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God and of His holy Sacraments : in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.’

And according to the view taken in our Prayer Book this is no mere empty form of words. Great as is the authority that is given, it is intended to be used. To the sick person who, feeling his conscience troubled by some weighty matter, has made a special confession of his sins, humbly and heartily desiring absolution, the priest is directed to say: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences: and by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins: in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

And yet the question may arise, nay, must arise, in the heart of every faithful man, 'Can this claim to forgive sins be substantiated? Do not they who thus speak blaspheme? Who can forgive sins but One, even God?'

We need not, I think, have any hesitation in admitting that the religion of Christ as set forth in the Gospels is not, on the face of it, a sacerdotal religion in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Not only does our blessed Lord invite us to a direct communion with Himself

—‘Come unto Me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,’ ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them’—but in the prayer which He Himself has taught us to address to God Almighty, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven,’ it is manifest that the intervention of a priest between God and man is not contemplated; for what child needs a priest as a mediator between himself and his father?

But notwithstanding this, the fact remains that our Lord did say to His disciples, and that on one of the most memorable occasions in His intercourse with them, ‘Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them: whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained’; and the very fact that these words seem at first sight so incongruous with the other teaching of Christ, while it is an argument for their authenticity, imperatively demands that we should decide for ourselves what is their meaning. If there is given to us authority to forgive sins, then we are in duty bound to act upon this authority. The Master who has committed this talent to us is austere in His reckoning. He will not tolerate that

the talents which He bestows should be laid up in a napkin. If we have authority to forgive men their sins, we must forgive them ; if to retain, we must retain them.

Now when we begin to examine into the scope of this great commission, we cannot fail to notice that a somewhat similar commission was on an earlier occasion given by our Lord to His chief Apostle : ' I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'

I have called the terms of St. Peter's commission ' somewhat similar ' to those of my text, for it must not be supposed that the *loosing* and *binding* are synonymous with *forgiving* and *retaining*. To an English reader, it is true, the words ' bind ' and ' loose ' seem obviously to refer to *sins*, which in the one case would be ' bound ' to the sinner (according to a metaphor used by the prophet Isaiah, and familiar to us from Bunyan's ' Pilgrim's

Progress'), in the other 'loosed' from him. But the usage of the Talmudic Hebrew, in which the words 'bind' and 'loose' are very common, shows that this is not the correct interpretation. The Rabbis habitually speak of a practice which they consider unlawful as 'bound'; one which is regarded as lawful, on the other hand, is said to be 'loosed.'

Thus it is said of many things, the legality of which was discussed in the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai, 'The school of Shammai binds it (*i.e.*, declares it unlawful), the school of Hillel looses it.'

Accordingly our Lord's commission to St. Peter amounts to this—that what St. Peter shall bind (*i.e.*, declare unlawful) upon earth shall be recognized as unlawful in the kingdom of heaven; his words shall decide the conditions of membership of the kingdom of heaven; he shall have the keys to open and to shut.

We need not suppose that this commission was given to St. Peter only. In fact, since the author of the first Gospel repeats these words in the plural (chap. xviii., ver. 18), where the context obviously refers to the Church as a whole, it is plain that he regarded the com-

mission to bind and to loose as given to the *whole* Church ; and, indeed, we have in Scripture an instance of the exercise of this power of binding and loosing by the Church. Thus the eating of things sacrificed to idols was by the Council of Jerusalem 'bound (*i.e.*, declared unlawful), while by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in cases where no scandal could be occasioned, it is 'loosed.'

And this power of binding and loosing belongs to the Church in all ages. In the temperate language of our own XXth Article, 'the Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith : And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written.' None of us lives to himself ; and though all things not in themselves sinful are *lawful* to us, we cannot ignore the decisions of the community as to what things may be *expedient*. Christ has called us not to anarchy, but to a service which is perfect freedom. It becomes us, as it became our Lord and Master, to fulfil all righteousness.

Few people will be disposed to cavil at this claim of the Church, the Christian community, to bind and to loose; but in what sense can it claim the power to forgive sins or to retain them?

Now, we can hardly suppose that our Lord entrusted to His Church a power which He Himself had never used, and therefore, if we are to discover the exact nature of the authority committed to us, we must needs consider whether the records of our Saviour's life on earth furnish us with any examples of the power of forgiveness or retention of sins being exercised by Him. In this connexion the story of the sick of the palsy at Capernaum let down through the roof at our Lord's feet will at once occur to every one. The Evangelists certainly imply that the sick man was a stranger to our Saviour; and therefore we cannot suppose that his sins, which Jesus declared to be forgiven, had been committed against the Saviour at an earlier period of His life on earth. The scribes who were present understood the words, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' to have reference to the guilt of those sins which the sick of the palsy had committed

against God, and that in this respect they had correctly understood our Saviour is clear from His subsequent words.

We see, then, that Jesus of Nazareth pronounced upon a sinner full absolution for sins for which the sinner himself and his associates believed that he would have to answer at the judgment-seat of God.

In what capacity, then, did Jesus say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee'?

It may seem a startling question to ask concerning One whom we believe to be 'perfect God,' but it is a question which must be asked, and, while remembering always the transcendent mystery of the Incarnation, we must try to answer it. Did our Lord exercise this power to forgive sins by virtue of His eternal Godhead, or by virtue of His manhood? Is it a Divine attribute, or one belonging to, and in full harmony with, His human environment?

I need scarcely repeat again that I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; but at the same time,

while I would affirm His perfect Godhead, I would also safeguard the belief in His perfect manhood. And just as I believe that many things may be said of me which are true only of my mortal body, and not of my immortal soul, so I believe that many things are recorded of the passible human nature of Jesus of Nazareth which could not be predicated of the impassible Godhead.

‘There is one living and true God,’ says the first of our Articles, ‘everlasting, without body, parts, or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.’ But ‘Jesus *increased* in wisdom,’ therefore as a boy of twelve He was not infinitely wise; He sat *weary* on the well of Sychar, therefore He was not at that moment of infinite power.

The intellectual difficulty is precisely the same in the former instance as in the latter. In each case we see the Saviour laying aside, as it were, the infinite, subjecting Himself to human limitations. Remember that this doctrine of our Lord’s *κένωσις* is no new one. It could not be expressed by anyone more emphatically than it is by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘It became Him, for

whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.' And again: 'It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining unto God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.' And again: 'We have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' And again: 'Though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey Him the author of eternal salvation.'

And if we bear in mind these strong assertions of the discipline and temptation which our Lord underwent, if we remember that it is recorded that before His greatest miracles He prayed to the Father in heaven, that He promised to His disciples power to work the

same miracles which He wrought, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers, and to cast out devils, we shall, I think, have no difficulty in believing, though we cannot understand how it could be, that whatsoever our Lord did throughout His earthly life was done, not by His eternal Godhead working through human flesh, but in His perfect manhood through faith in the God whom He came to reveal. Only thus, indeed, could He have become to us the perfect Saviour. 'Since by *man* came death, by *man* came also the resurrection of the dead.'

And thus we need have no hesitation in affirming that, when Jesus of Nazareth pronounced on the sick of the palsy the words, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' He claimed as *man* power to forgive sins committed against *God*. Indeed, His own words show that this is the case: 'But that ye may know that the *Son of man* hath power on *earth* to forgive sins.'

But this brings us to the question, What is meant by the forgiveness of sins? If one man forgives another a debt, the act of forgiveness affects both creditor and debtor ;

the former foregoes what is legally his, the latter is loosed from the burden of a heavy responsibility. Moreover, the act of forgiveness is one which takes place at some definite time. Until it has taken place, whatever the sentiments of the creditor towards the debtor may be, the one is liable to pay, and the other can legally claim.

Are we, then, to understand that at the moment at which our Lord spoke the words, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' the mutual relations of God and the sick of the palsy were changed? We can, perhaps, best answer this question by asking another: When were St. Paul's sins forgiven? Is not the very fact that the Saviour appeared to him as he journeyed to Damascus in itself a proof that he was *already forgiven* by the Divine Love? And yet for three days he fasted and prayed for forgiveness, till Ananias laid his hands on him, and said, 'Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' If God had forgiven St. Paul, what, we ask, could baptism do more? If the great Absolver had put away his sins, what need had he of Ananias' absolution?

We cannot suppose that God's attitude (if I may be allowed to use such an anthropomorphic expression of the Deity) towards St. Paul was altered by Ananias' absolution and the Apostle's subsequent baptism. The Love which had first appealed to Him in the words, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' was the same Love which taught him afterwards to cry, 'Abba, Father.' As far as the *sentiment* of forgiveness is concerned, Saul was forgiven, even when he made havoc of the Church. The same Love which, when manifested in Christ on earth, prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' forgives men their sins, even though in their puny hatred they blaspheme against it. But the *sentiment* of forgiveness is of no avail unless the sinner is aware of it. A creditor may have determined to forgive a debt, but the wretched debtor who is toiling to scrape together enough money to pay the debt gains no happiness, if he is ignorant of the creditor's intention. Of what use to us is God's love, till we have apprehended it, and made it our own? Till then we dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, being fast bound with an

iron bond of misery. But then with the knowledge of the pitifulness of God's great mercy comes the loosening of the chain of our sins by which we are bound; the old things pass away; all things become new.

We may, therefore, conclude that Ananias pronounced absolution on St. Paul in order that the Apostle might apprehend the gift which was already potentially his. And, similarly, our Lord announced to the sick of the palsy a fact which, as far as God was concerned, had been true the whole of the sick man's life. His sins were forgiven him, though he did not know it; now God's righteous servant by His knowledge wrought his justification.

Our Saviour declared that 'the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins'; and in that phrase 'Son of man' He associates with Himself His Church.* As, therefore, the Church in the person of Christ, who is its

* See Dan. vii. 27, where the 'Son of man' is explained as 'the people of the saints of the Most High'; and compare St. Mark viii. 38, where our Lord is represented as making a distinction between Himself and the Son of man.

Head, forgave the sick of the palsy, so it behoves every member of that body to forgive those who are sick in the palsy of their soul. Our absolution is, of course, conditional on the faith of the penitent. As in the case of our benediction, if a son of peace be not found, our blessing will return to us, so, if a son of absolution be not before us, our absolution will return void. But to him who, like Saul of Tarsus, prays for forgiveness, the word which God speaks by our mouth will not return unto Him void: for we have the authority of Christ: 'Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven.'

But we have received from our Lord a commission not only to forgive sins, but also, in some cases, to retain them, and it may be thought that the exercise of such a power involves a responsibility to which, frail and erring as we are, we are altogether unequal. And since this is so, we naturally look to our Lord and Master for an example in the matter. It must be our aim to retain sins only when, and in the same way as, Christ would have retained them.

But have we in the record of Christ's life

on earth any instance of this power of the retention of sins being exercised by Him ? He who came not to judge the world but to save the world, did He ever retain sins ?

We may, indeed, find several instances of the retention of sins by Christ in the Gospels, but it will be sufficient for my purpose to refer to one. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, and knelt down, saying, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ?' it seems likely that he hoped to receive from Christ's lips a plenary absolution. Not that he was burdened by a particularly heavy sense of sin, but he felt that there was a state of blessedness to which he had not yet attained, that he still lacked somewhat of the full title to eternal life. In the unsatisfied longing of his soul, he could not apply to himself the Psalmist's words, 'Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.'

It must have been a sore temptation to the loving heart of the Saviour to say to him, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' We know that 'looking upon him, He loved him'; but He knew that there was with him a sin—

that is to say, a missing of the mark of perfect righteousness—which must be put away before he could attain to the perfect vision of God. Instead of absolving him, therefore, Jesus imposed upon him a hard condition, and he who had come full of hope that his sins might be forgiven went away exceeding sorrowful because the Saviour had retained them.

And in like manner there are times when we, too, must retain the sins of men who seek to have them forgiven. How often in these days men come laden with gifts to the Church of Christ seeking for absolution ! Costly decorations of painted glass, marble and mosaic, carving and embroidery, gold and silver plate for the service of the sanctuary, rich alms of libraries and hospitals, schools and asylums—how often such things are offered on the tacit understanding that the giver is granted full absolution !

And yet when we know—as in some cases we do know—that the money which has purchased them has been gained through traffic in other men's sins, that the fortunes (of which, after all, but a small fraction is offered)

have been amassed by sharp practice, not to call it fraud, by callous indifference to the welfare of the community, at the cost of wrecked homes and ruined lives, can we accept the offering so brought? Can we 'eat the sin of God's people, and to their transgression lift up our soul'? Nay, cost us what it will, though we worship in churches of barn-like bareness, though we celebrate the Eucharist in pewter vessels, the example of Christ is clear before us, and we dare not swerve from the commission which He has entrusted to us, 'Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.'

We are permitted to forgive or retain sins only in this life, and when we retain them we do so praying that God in His goodness will grant forgiveness. Over what takes place beyond this world we have no control. 'There the work of life is tried by a juster Judge than here.'

Our Saviour's commission to forgive sins applies only to those who in their ignorance of God need to be brought to Him. When a man has received the Spirit of adoption whereby he cries 'Abba, Father,' he needs no more a

priest to absolve him—rather he is himself a priest. But there are some to whom this blessedness has not yet been granted. It may be that, like Saul of Tarsus, their eyes are blinded that they cannot see the Light ; it may be that in the palsy of their sins they are incapable of rising and coming to the Healer ; it may be that they have fallen into a ‘Slough of Despond,’ and need a helping hand to set their feet upon the rock, and to order their going.

But many will doubtless ask, ‘If this is the meaning of our Saviour’s words to His disciples, why does the Church apparently limit them only to those who are ordained priests ? Why is not the commission, “Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained,” given to a deacon ?’

We may, I think, answer such a question from the analogy of the civil state. In any free community a governor (whatever be the exact nature of his power) derives his authority from the community which he governs. In other words, the power belongs to the community, and it is delegated to, or, if you

prefer it, concentrated in, the person of the ruler, to ensure for it a proper measure of activity. In like manner the cure of souls, with the duties involved in it of binding and loosing, absolving and retaining, belongs to that community which we call the Church of Christ. But since in things spiritual as in things temporal, what is every one's business is nobody's business, the Church has appointed shepherds, to whom she has delegated in a special sense the cure of the souls with which she is entrusted, and whom she expects to use, not in an abnormal, but in a more abundantly active, manner, the powers committed to her. But it must be remembered that these shepherds have always been called by the Christian Church *elders*, *presbyters*. They are not *priests* in a community of *laymen*; rather they are *elders* in a Church of *priests*. The community which chooses them to be elders does not thereby forfeit its own powers. It does not become a community of laymen because it has set apart certain of its members to be elders; it remains a community of priests—of those, that is to say, whom God would have act as mediators between

Himself and sinful humanity that knows Him not.

And therefore, my brethren, seeing that we have obtained this ministry, let us stir up the gift that is in us. Whose soever sins we retain, they are retained ; let us, therefore, nerve ourselves for the ordeal. Whose soever sins we forgive, they are forgiven : thanks be to God who has given such power unto men.

THE END

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